
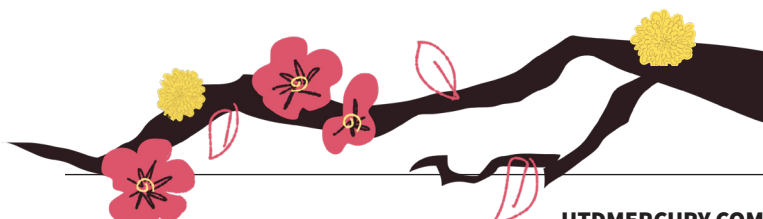


THE MERCURY





UTDMERCURY.COM

Who's who in election season? See **6**

Alum makes mark on Filipinos. See **10**

ALL OUT FOR LUNAR NEW YEAR

Comets celebrate the arrival of the year of the dragon at the Plinth with festival hosted by student groups



Students make cards with wishes for the free year, including getting accepted to grad school. The sticky-note wishes were left on a cardboard dragon at the Plinth during the Lunar New Year festival.

ANDRÉ AVERION

Mercury Staff

Lion dancers spewing fire, sparkling firecrackers and countless other festivities welcomed Comets to Asia Times Square in Grand Prairie for one of Texas' largest celebrations of East Asian culture, welcoming a new year and the approach of spring. And on the night of Feb. 9, students brought their own slice of culture to campus with booths at the Plinth.

This year's three-week celebration from Jan. 26 – Feb. 11 marked the 17th year that Asia Times Square has hosted vendors and packed crowds in the thousands, each eager for the live entertainment and foods unique to the holiday. Originally beginning in 2007, the festival was known as the Vietnamese “Dem Cho Hoa” (Night Flower Market) before it grew to invite different Asian ethnic groups from across DFW.

While still preserving Asia Times Square's Vietnamese roots, the 2024 celebration introduced attendees to cuisines from a wide variety of cultures, including Chinese, Korean, Taiwanese, Lao, Indonesia, Japanese, Latino, Filipino, African American, Caucasian

and Nigerian. In between sweet treats and endless merchandise, for the first two weeks of the festival, attendees could view artist alleys, martial arts demonstrations and dance group performances from UTD before the grand finale fire-cracker celebration on Feb. 11.

Meanwhile, students on campus set up their own vendors and activities during a collaborative event Feb. 9, or Lunar New Year's Eve, bringing the celebration a little closer to home. Attending organizations included the Filipino Student Association, the Chinese Student Association, the Vietnamese Student Association, the Asian Art Association and Alpha Kappa Delta Phi sorority.

“Having that people interaction [is important], you know, seeing vendors and people enjoying what we have provided, or what we're selling,” biology senior Michelle Tran said. “It's been really fulfilling, and it feels really nice.”

Healthcare studies sophomore Daniel Tran said the holiday is an opportunity to come together.

“Lunar New Year is very important to me, and like most other Asian people growing up, we had this holiday to celebrate with other people. And it's a good time to gather round with friends to catch up with them,” Tran said.



PHOTOS BY: KATYA ZAKARIAN | PHOTO EDITOR, GRAPHICS BY: ANIKA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF

Fanfiction contest winner captures UTD meme culture

SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

Thirty seconds before the EROL II writing competition's initial deadline, biochemistry sophomore Maria Shaikh submitted her fanfiction magnum opus, “Benson takes the rocks in the divorce,” which secured her first place in the contest. Despite being the last to submit, “The Divorce” secured infamy in the world of EROL storytelling.

EROL II is the second iteration of a Student Government fanfiction writing competition started in 2022 as a way to showcase UTD's student culture and creativity. Through November and December 2023, UTD subreddit users had a chance to submit stories written about



MARIA SHAIKH

SEE EROL, PAGE 7

Alumnus invention lets you game with your feet

The former Comet's innovative new controller, known as Glydr, has gathered almost \$65,000 in funding

REES BLATT
Mercury Staff

A UTD Alumnus recently launched a Kickstarter campaign for a product named Glydr, which introduces a controller that allows you to play video games with your feet, offering a new immersive way to game. At the time of publication, the campaign has amassed almost \$65,000.

Glydr is a peripheral device that allows a user to perform in-game actions through foot inputs. Initially created by UTD alumnus Rick Tett to address the challenge of awkward move-



ment in virtual reality environments, it now serves as a versatile controller for a wide array of games, applicable to both VR and general PC gaming. Spanning 7 years, the controller went through

“We had high confidence we would get funded in the first day, so it was very pleasant we hit it in the first hour.”

— Rick Tett

nine iterations until Tett settled on the current model.

“Wouldn't it be cool if you could take the concept of a hoverboard using

your two feet, with slight moves to fly around in physical space, and use that as digital input?” Tett said.

It introduces an innovative and more

accessible way to engage with video games, especially for individuals who find traditional mouse, keyboard or gamepad setups challenging. By mapping these actions onto a foot-controlled device, Tett said the device acts as a versatile peripheral

that transcends accessibility features, with the ability to enhance the gaming experience for a wide audience.

“With a market the size of the gamer market, I've just been looking for people to believe that this really could be something,” Tett said. “That's where I found my co-founders, especially John Warren ... he sees the huge potential in this.”

John Warren is the Chief Marketing Officer for Glydr; his father originally introduced him to Tett. After hearing of the product for the first time, he was surprised to find nothing like it existed. When he left his job, Tett reached back out, leading to Warren's decision to join Glydr as a co-founder.

“I used it to play Risk of Rain 2 and

SEE GLYDR, PAGE 7

Dallas No. 50 in US for STDs — how to stay safe

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

A recent study from Innerbody Research found that Dallas ranks No. 50 in the top 100 U.S. cities with the highest rates of STDs. To stay safe from high rates of STD transmission, Comets can take advantage of the resources provided by UTD's Health Center and Student Wellness Center, like condoms and HIV

testing.

Innerbody is a think tank comprised of researchers, scientists and medical professionals whose mission is to provide science-based information about different health concerns in the U.S. The recent study looked at transmission rates per capita and found that the South accounted for a disproportionate number of STD cases; eight out of the top 100 cities were

located in Texas. Chlamydia and gonorrhea have both increased to pre-2020 levels. Eric Rodriguez, CEO and co-founder of Innerbody, said that a major factor in why sexually transmitted diseases are so prevalent has to do with the lack of sex education.

“Another major factor that is very relevant to college-age students is the stigma in cultural factors behind STDs,” Rodri-

guez said. “It's something that is kind of out of sight, out of mind. Younger people do not really feel comfortable with speaking to their doctors.”

Austin Rupert, assistant director for the Student Wellness Center, said he was not surprised by this due to the social and legal factors that affect STD transmission.

SEE STDs, PAGE 7



THE MERCURY
UTDMERCURY.COM
Volume XXIII
No. 13

Editor-in-Chief
Fatimah Azeem
editor@utdm Mercury.com
(972) 883-2287

Managing Editor
Jack Sierputowski
managingeditor@utdm Mercury.com
972-883-2227

Graphics Editor
Kathryn Ho
graphics@utdm Mercury.com

Photo Editor
Katya Zakar
photo@utdm Mercury.com

Copy Editor
Fiyin Olajide

News Editor
Gregorio Olivares
news@utdm Mercury.com

Life and Arts Editor
Mia Nguyen
life@utdm Mercury.com

Opinion Editor
Maria Shaikh
opinioneditor@utdm Mercury.com

Web Editor
Rainier Pederson
web@utdm Mercury.com

Distribution Manager
André Averion
distro@utdm Mercury.com

Social Media Manager
Anika Sultana
media@utdm Mercury.com

Contributors
Aafiya Aslam
Rees Blatt
Gregory Binu
Tyler Burkhardt
Grace Cowger
Aarav Dev
Hridya Dhulipala
Yiyi Ding
Erin Gutsche
Zara Jamshed
Ann Jayan
Hyun Lim
Paola Martinez
Sofia Meinardus
Madabuchi Okoro
Nahum Pilli
Alana Platt
Kavya Racheeti
Shreya Ravi
Ruben Rodriguez
Ananya Sammidi
Surjaditya Sarkar
Arushi Sharma
Anika Sultana
Ardra Trivedi
Rachel Woon

Corrections/Clarifications
Bring factual errors or inaccuracies to the attention of *The Mercury's* staff by emailing editor@utdm Mercury.com or calling (972) 883-2287 and a correction will be published in this space in a future issue.

Media Adviser
Jonathan Stewart
jonathan.stewart@utdallas.edu

Mailing Address
800 West Campbell Road, SU 24
Richardson, TX 75080-0688

Newsroom
Student Union, Student Media Suite SU 1.601

The Mercury is published on Mondays, at two-week intervals during the long term of The University of Texas at Dallas, except holidays and exam periods, and once every four weeks during the summer term.

Advertising is accepted by *The Mercury* on the basis that there is no discrimination by the advertiser in the offering of goods or services to any person, on any basis prohibited by applicable law. The publication of advertising in *The Mercury* does not constitute an endorsement of products or services by the newspaper, or the UTD administration.

Opinions expressed in *The Mercury* are those of the editor, the editorial board or the writer of the article. They are not necessarily the view of the UTD administration, the Board of Regents or the Student Media Operating Board.

The Mercury's editors retain the right to refuse or edit any submission based on libel, malice, spelling, grammar and style, and violations of Section 54.23 (f) (1-6) of UTD policy.

Copyright © 2022, The University of Texas at Dallas. All articles, photographs and graphic assets, whether in print or online, may not be reproduced or republished in part or in whole without express written permission.



Police Blotter

Feb. 1

- While driving, an unknown assailant hit an unattended vehicle. The incident is still under investigation.

Feb. 5

- During a car accident, a driver failed to exchange insurance and identification with the other driver and left the scene without reporting the accident. The investigation is currently inactive.

Feb. 6

- An individual was caught with the possession of an unknown substances and was cleared by arrest.

Feb. 6

- An individual approached in an aggressive manner in the early morning at 3 a.m.

Feb. 6

- A theft was reported in an apartment and is currently under investigation.

VEHICULAR INCIDENT

THEFT

DRUGS & ALCOHOL

OTHER



From The Mercury Archives: February 5, 1996

The Lunar New Year: Friends, relatives celebrate the Year of the Mouse

By Kathleen Richter

People from all over the world will come together Feb. 17 to celebrate the Lunar New Year and the beginning of the Year of the Mouse.

The Lunar New Year is often referred to as the Chinese New Year. It is Chinese in origin, but is celebrated by people in many Asian cultures. It is also celebrated by those who want to commemorate the birth of spring and honor family, forgiveness, and new beginnings.

The Lunar New Year begins with the second new moon after the winter solstice, which appears between Jan. 21 and Feb. 19.

The Chinese calendar is lunar, or based on the moon, and consists of 12 months that alternate between 29 and 30 days. The Chinese lunar year lasts 354 days. In order to make it coincide with the solar year of about 365 days, an extra month is added to the calendar once every four years.

Each Chinese year is named

after an animal. The animals, in the order in which they occur, are: rat, ox, tiger, hare, dragon, snake, horse, sheep, monkey, fowl, dog, and pig. This cycle of years and animals is used to describe personality traits and tell fortunes, much in the way the 12 signs of the zodiac are used in the west.

The Lunar New Year has been celebrated for around 4,000 years. Long ago, farmers would hold feasts in the spring to thank the gods for allowing warm weather to come again and to pray for the following year's crops.

Today, people give gifts and greeting cards to their relatives and friends to express love and gratitude and to wish each other happiness and longevity. In Vietnam, where birthdays are often not celebrated, it is common to hear people wish each other a happy birthday at this time.

Before the Lunar New Year, many people pay off debts,

return borrowed goods, and forgive mistakes in celebration of the new beginning. Arguments are often avoided and grief is suppressed.

Celebration begins seven days before the Lunar New Year. A food offering is made to the Chinese kitchen god, who, according to legend, will make his annual report on each household to the Jade Emperor of the heavens. People clean their houses inside and out to prepare for his coming and to commemorate the rebirth of spring. If the kitchen god finds a house to be clean and makes a positive report to the Jade Emperor, then the inhabitants of the house will experience good luck.

On the eve of the Lunar New Year, many people attend church or temple. After church, they return home, where they pray to their ancestors, whose spirits are believed to return to earth during the Lunar New Year. They express gratitude for the previous year and ask for

guidance in the new year.

The Lunar New Year lasts three days, and it is believed that whatever happens on the first day will repeat itself throughout the year. Therefore, the first visitor to the house on the first day is significant. No one can pay a visit to anyone else unless invited, and people are careful to only invite guests who are rich, prestigious and happy.

On the second day, people visit the tombs of dead relatives and friends. On the third day, they visit friends and family to pay homage to ancestors and wish each other luck in the coming year.

AI is changing real estate — and it's not what you think

REES BLATT
Mercury Staff

Will AI steal your job? Representatives from Weitzman, a large Texas real estate firm, think otherwise, saying AI will instead automate the tedious parts of work and allow us to focus more on the parts that require human insight and expertise.

Articles from sources such as *The New York Times* and *Forbes* have labeled AI as a potential job killer for skilled workers, like those in the tech industry. Weitzman employees questioned the accuracy of pessimistic views on AI, and explored more hopeful perspectives in their presentation to the UTD Real Estate Club. They presented AI as a tool to enhance the daily productivity of employees, rather than a complete substitute for human workers. They suggested this would mark a shift in understanding AI's role in the workplace — as an aid to human effort rather than its replacement — as the firm currently uses AI to derive insights from large amounts of data.

"A lot of these companies are starting to use AI now, not everyone is," Geographic Informations System Specialist Nicholas Bailey said. "A lot of people say 'AI' but it's just machine learning. It's a hot catchphrase right now, so it's easy to get fooled."

In many large corporations, including Weitzman, AI is applied to automate redundant and costly tasks, like deriving a property value from different data points. Importantly, these applications of AI are not meant to



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

replace the humans behind these jobs, but rather to augment and streamline their work.

"They're [commercial real estate companies] just enhancing their workflows," Vice President of Research Rob Darnell said. "They're making redundant tasks less redundant so people can actually have time to think critically and do a more error-free job."

Darnell said this is in contrast to traditional means of surveying and appraisal, which require sifting through droves of data on the activity level of a certain area, or using aerial photography to analyze building rooftops.

This work was painstakingly carried out as the information it provided was extremely useful to firms such as Weitzman.

"The playing field still isn't level because it's what you do with the data," Darnell said. "Just throwing it into this AI machine and pushing the AI

button doesn't make an AI heavenous."

A major risk associated with the widespread adoption of AI is the phenomenon of 'AI hallucination.' This occurs when AI models generate outputs that include erroneous or fabricated information, like when Microsoft's chat AI confessed its love for a user. The danger lies in the fact that this information can appear highly credible to those who don't understand the subject matter. In the real estate market, inaccurate information could lead to skewed property valuations or misinformed investment decisions.

"If you just take [AI] at its word, you're already doing it wrong," Darnell said. "I don't care how well it works. I don't care if it answered your question perfectly, if you're just believing in it, you just screwed up. You gotta double check it."

AI, currently far from perfect, is undergoing continuous refinement and is only beginning to be integrated across most businesses. This phenomenon is one that merits close attention, as there appears to be no foreseeable end to the corporate world's fascination with AI. For the time being, the prospect of gradually phasing out costly and redundant labor remains too enticing for many companies to ignore.

"No matter how you feel about AI and the changing world, just keep an open mind," Darnell said. "They're tools to help you, but it is not a replacement for thought."



GREGORY BINU | MERCURY STAFF

Two members of UTD Wind, a competitive research club, discuss turbine design.

ZARA JAMSHEED
Mercury Staff

Texas is leading the nation in renewable energy expansion — specifically in wind energy — with which UTD is playing a critical role. Now with \$1.6 million entering the campus thanks to Congress' Consolidated Appropriations Act, UTD will enhance student research opportunities by constructing a new wind energy research headquarters, water wave tunnel and Intelligent Energy systems lab.

UTD already has a foot in the door when it comes to the wind industry, possessing the BLAST wind tunnel — which can create winds speeds between 76 mph and 112 mph — as well as a team that ranked fourth nationally last year in the Department of Energy's Collegiate Wind Competition. Construction of the 4,478

UTD receives \$1.6 million to boost wind research, renovate wind tunnel, labs

square foot headquarters is set to begin in February and will provide UTD with new offices and meeting spaces. The Energy Intelligent Systems Lab will allow students to work on designing the circuits used in wind turbines. Finally, the new wind tunnel will allow UTD to research offshore wind energy generation through a wind wave tank inside the tunnel. This would increase research opportunities related to renewable energy development, expand the size of UTD's wind energy club, and give UTD's innovation capabilities an edge.

According to Texas Comptroller, Texas accounts for 26% of all wind-generated electricity in the U.S and has led the country for 17 years in wind energy production. Professor Mario Rotea, the director of mechanical engineering, the

UTD wind site director and the director of WindStar. Rotea said that renewable energy will be a key part of the future American power grid.

"The future of the power grid will probably be a combination of natural gas, wind and solar, and those are probably going to be the predominant sources in the near to medium term," Rotea said.

Robin Reeves, a PhD student at UTD, a research assistant in professor Todd Griffith's lab and the Turbine design lead for UTD's wind energy competition, said that UTD has the largest wind tunnel in the U.S. but cannot research offshore wind energy. This method for wind capture has the largest power potential and would augment UTD's research abilities.

SEE WIND, PAGE 8

Law and letters

Literature degree to debut pre-law concentration

MARIA SHAIKH
Mercury Staff

After two years of program development, the legal field is coming to Literature students through a new pre-law concentration debuting in fall 2024.

Joining four other concentrations already available to Literature majors, the pre-law concentration will include five classes centering on legal history, and research and writing, with the aim of preparing Comets for law school and legal professions. Literature Program Director Charles Hatfield said the department developed the new concentration in response to an explosive growth in student population.

"Enrollment in undergraduate literature classes, academic year 23-24, is at an all-time high," Hatfield said. "So we're doing great. And we really believe in what we offer ... We want to clarify that, because I think sometimes parents will say, 'What on earth are you gonna do with a B.A. in literature?'"

Graduates who majored in Literature perform better on the LSAT than other majors traditionally associated with law and are admitted to law school at higher rates, Hatfield said, due to the analytical skills developed within the degree's mate-

rial. The pre-law concentration was designed in tandem with law schools, legal professionals and the Pre-Law Advising Center to emphasize these strengths while keeping the majority of the Literature curriculum constant.

"We think that this combination of our really great rigorous literary studies courses combined with these focused electives from political science and American studies ... are really gonna do a great job getting students prepared for law school admission," Hatfield said.

Any concentration in the Literature major is made up of five classes built into the degree plan as free electives. The pre-law concentration will consist of RHET 4320, a new legal research and writing class taught by an attorney and developed for this concentration, PSCI 3303 Civil Liberties, PSCI 3322 Constitutional Law, ISIS 4304 Trials in American Culture and one free law-focused elective. Text-heavy coursework makes the concentration ideal for students interested in writing, Hatfield said.

"Professor [Erin] Greer mentioned a student who published a chat book of poetry and got into a really great, top-ranked

SEE LAW, PAGE 8

Alumni tech startup accelerates to success

ANANYA SAMMIDI
Mercury Staff

Bugs and glitches in mobile applications can impact business revenue, dramatically decrease customer satisfaction and waste software developers' precious time. To combat these issues, alumni Illiana Reed, Isabella Reed and Miguel Salinas set out to streamline mobile app testing with AI through their startup camelQA, which is part of the winter 2024 Y Combinator batch.

The Y Combinator is a startup accelerator that started in 2005 and has launched 4,000 startups with a combined valuation of \$6 billion. Startups accepted into Y Combinator go through a three-month program designed to develop their product and attract funding. According to Y Combinator, this involves an initial investment, mentorship and educational opportunities aimed to give startups a steep advantage.

Companies that have been through the accelerator include Airbnb, DoorDash, Coinbase, Reddit and Dropbox. According to Y Combinator, there is a 1.5-2% acceptance rate into the program. camelQA passed all the rounds of screening, which include a written essay and an interview, and successfully made it into the winter 2024 batch.

"[Through Y Combinator] you have the opportunity to present all the problems that you're facing and then have somebody who's not only been through the program, but has exited at potentially a unicorn status, which

means their company exited over a billion dollars," camelQA CRO Isabella Reed said. "Like helping you decipher what to do next and helping you with the problem."

camelQA is an AI tool that helps software developers test their mobile applications and find software bugs without additional human intervention. Developers provide the link to their application and testing instructions in plain English, and camelQA automatically provides detailed reporting and documentation to help developers resolve the bug.

The idea for camelQA originated when Illiana Reed, the CEO, and Salinas, the CTO, decided to leave their careers at Google and Apple to pursue indie mobile development.

"[Google] honestly, for me, it wasn't fulfilling my entrepreneurial bug ... I like seeing my work have impact," Illiana Reed said. "And when you're working at a place like Google, it's just so big that it's really difficult to make a lot of impact."

Illiana Reed and Salinas brought Isabella Reed onto the team for technical sales and revenue operations, and within eight months last year, they developed and delivered five mobile products to customers. Through their experience shipping mobile applications, they ran into the same issues regarding QA testing that they encountered in their previous roles and decided to address the problem with camelQA.

"We were building mobile apps, and



ISABELLA REED | COURTESY

Co-founders of camelQA meet at a YCombinator event. From left to right: Miguel Salinas, Illiana Reed and Isabella Reed.

Miguel is an excellent programmer, but he also loves to push things to production without testing," Illiana Reed said. "And I was like, you know what? We should just see if we can have AI simplify this process for us."

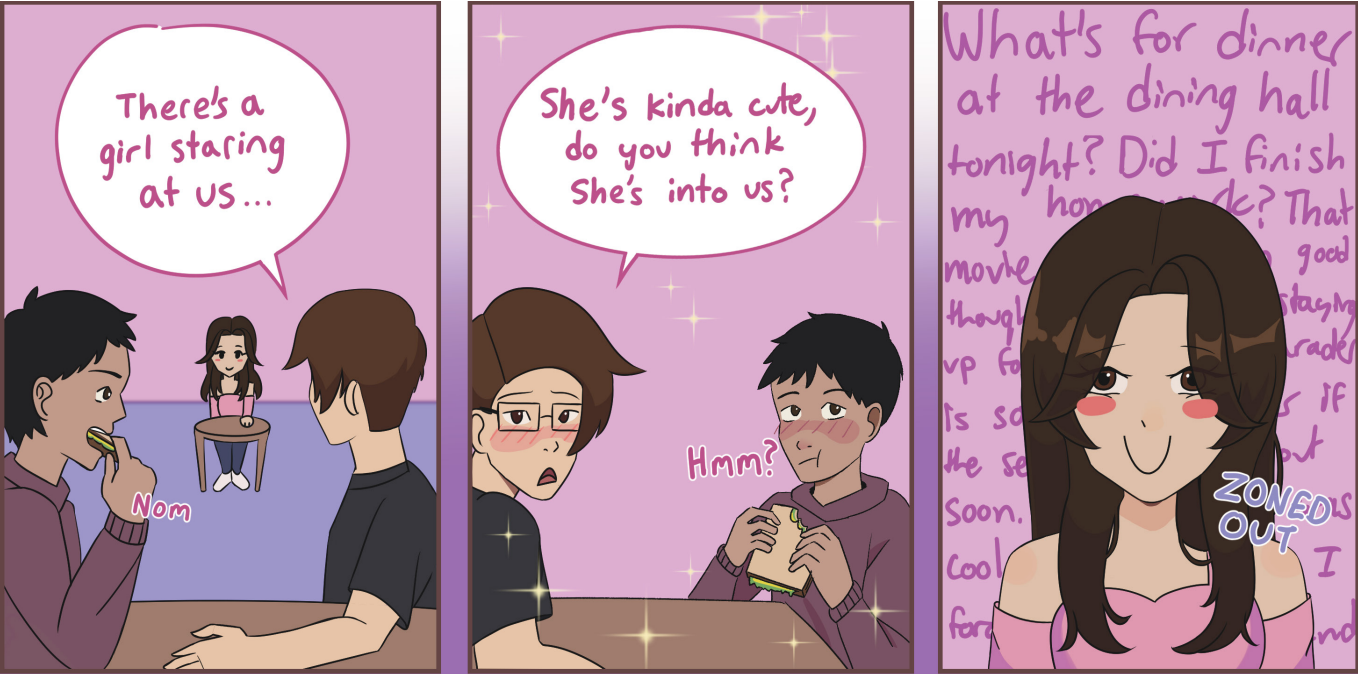
The camelQA team is currently working on scaling their software to meet the needs

of their customers and grow their company. Some of their future features involve automatically creating test cases to find software bugs, recommendations for bug fixes and web-based application testing. In the long run, they define success as becoming a de facto solution for mobile QA testing. The co-founders of camelQA are excited for

young entrepreneurs.

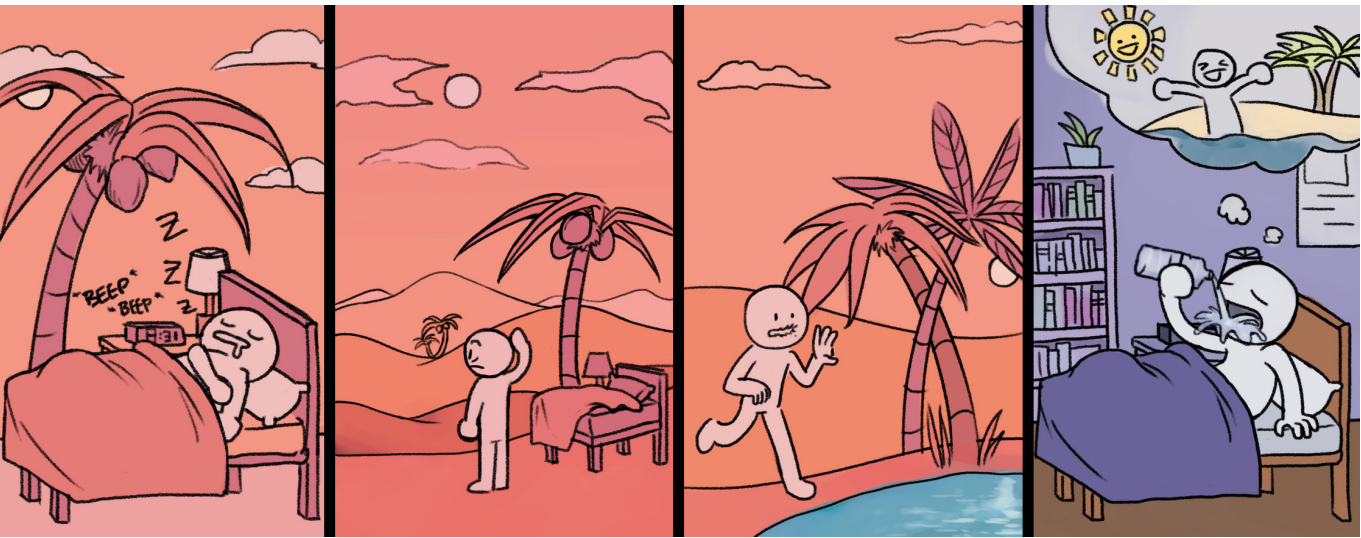
"Just try a bunch of stuff," Salinas said. "It's not probably your first idea. Probably it's not going to be a life changing thing, but it'll probably teach you way more than you think it will. So just ship something, even if it's small."

GIRL'S STARE



RACHEL WOON | MERCURY STAFF

WHERE IS MY WATER?



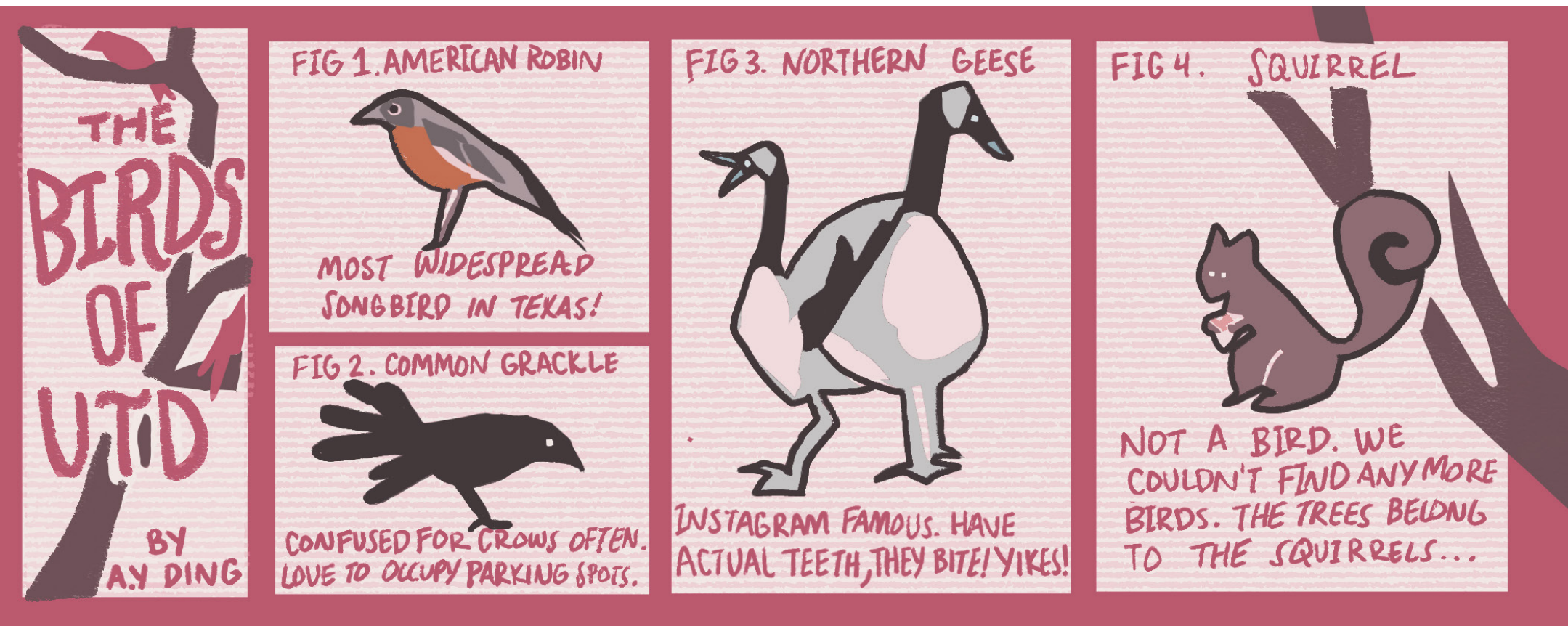
MADABUCHI OKORO | MERCURY STAFF

VALENTINE'S DAY IS A CAPITALISTIC SCAM



ANN JAYAN | MERCURY STAFF

BIRDS OF UTD



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

PARTY!



ERIN GUTSCHKE | MERCURY STAFF

student art showcase

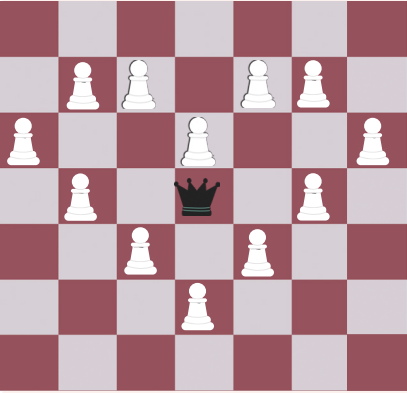
Send your art to graphics@utdmercury.com to be featured

Valentine's Day edition

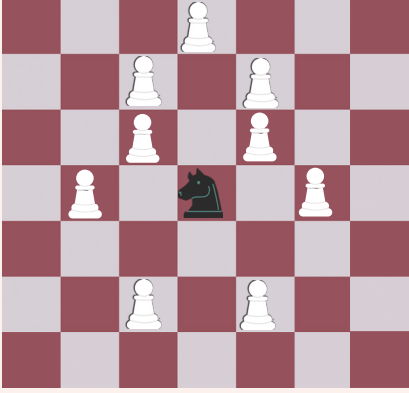
Chess Pacman

Rules: Take all of the pawns with the opposing color piece to solve the puzzle.

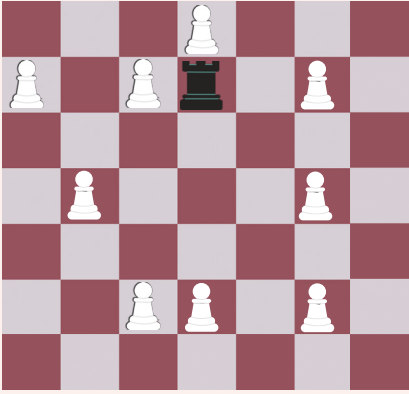
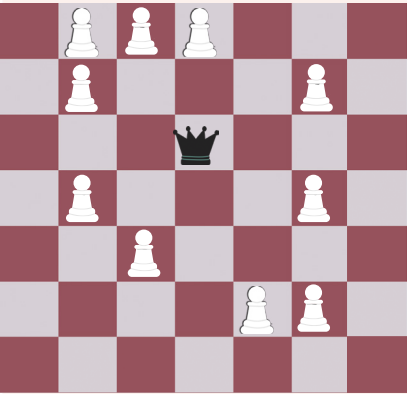
Easy: Queen of Hearts Medium: Knight's Proposal



1.29 Easy level key



1.29 Medium level key



CHESS PUZZLE BY AAFIYA ASLAM | MERCURY STAFF
CHESS PIECES BY YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

	1				6			5
			5	4			8	
		3						4
		7		9	4			8
8			3	7		2		
				5			4	
9	6		7					
			4					
					9	7	1	6

1.29 Sudoku key

7	2	9	8	5	6	4	3	1
6	1	8	4	3	7	5	2	9
3	5	4	1	9	2	6	8	7
5	6	1	3	4	9	2	7	8
8	9	2	7	6	1	3	4	5
4	3	7	2	8	5	9	1	6
9	4	3	6	7	8	1	5	2
1	7	5	9	2	3	8	6	4
2	8	6	5	1	4	7	9	3

Themeless 2 key

JCS	SATAT	ILIAD
ART	TOUCH	NANCY
NOR	ALOHA	STONE
DWAYNE	SIPHONED	
JEWELRY	SLAY	
	AESOP	OPAQUE
BITSY	DANTE	URN
ASIT	LEGOS	MISO
SEN	DALAI	IOTAS
HEADIN	NSYNC	
	ASKS	EARHART
DECIMALS	NUANCE	
OMANI	ENOKI	OCR
GISTS	WOVEN	DAM
STAYS	STIES	ERS

Star crossed

Across

- 1 Celestial body that inspired a comedy horror movie of a similar name
11 Soft drink
15 "Oh, by the way ..."
17 13-down in Spanish
18 Country known for its tulips and windmills
19 Wild party
20 Bay window
21 Basic idea
22 Corp. bigwig
23 A small thrush
26 Lawyers' org.
28 Gov. program that gave out \$800 billion during the COVID-19 pandemic
31 Spider's creation
32 Tuscany's language
36 It's better to give than receive?
38 Gives consent
41 Sign of success
42 Satellite radio company
44 The third geologic period in the Paleoproterozoic Era
46 Disrespectful
48 Like Kobe Bryant, 15 times during his career
49 Earth-friendly prefix
50 Conspiracy theorist's hat material
52 "___ told": "That's the rumor"
53 Mexican misters
55 Miss out?
57 When doubled, a move one does after a whip
58 Apprehend
59 Vomiting
62 Wile E. Coyote's supplier
65 "For here ___ go?"
67 Standard pick-up line?
71 "What ___!"
72 Women just don't get it
75 "Tom's Diner" singer Suzanne
76 Like Romeo and Juliet... or a clue to the shaded squares
77 Sportscaster Andrews
78 They'll lay you to rest

Down

- 1 Pro ___
2 Fed. power dept.
3 Westbrook of "Bye Sister" fame
4 Surrey town in which George Harrison lived in the '60s
5 Hide out
6 E. Berlin's land
7 Electric ___
8 7-down, at sushi bars
9 ___-law
10 LAX postings
11 ___ tunnel syndrome
12 Ilhan of Congress
13 13-across in English
14 Greek god of war
16 Household liquidation events
24 Hip hop group with hit song "Fight For Your Right"
25 English channel
27 Pesto ingredient
28 Bunches of flowers
29 Royal son
30 Service provider
32 Wedding words

- 33 Knows about
34 Saudi ___
35 Little-known
37 Lucy of "Kill Bill"
39 Type of call: Abbr.
40 Therefore
43 Uber alternative?
45 "Treasure Island" monogram
47 ___ and outs
51 Chemical suffix
54 Like some bands
56 Embarrassing fail, in modern lingo

- 59 The younger of the Dolan twins
60 Havana's ___ Castle
61 Chess supercomputer
62 Modern initialism for Black dialect
63 "Believe" singer
64 Wise guys?
66 IRS auditor's requests
68 Throw away
69 "How ___ Your Mother"
70 Flanders and Bigby, among others
73 Text-scanning technology, briefly
74 G.I. grub

ALANA PLATT | MERCURY STAFF

Who's who this election season?



- 24
- Lower/waive tuition interest rate, dual credit to ease tuition

Address the root of gun violence, supporter of common-sense gun control

Pro-abortion

Call for ceasefire



- 24
- Four-year college tuition cap, suspend tuition increase

Supporter of 2nd Amendment and "reasonable regulation" of guns

Pro-abortion, supporter of "Women's Health Protection Act"

Pro-Israel



- 24
- Voted against student loan forgiveness

Pro-2nd Amendment, anti-gun control

Anti-abortion, co-sponsor of "Born Alive" bill

Pro-Israel

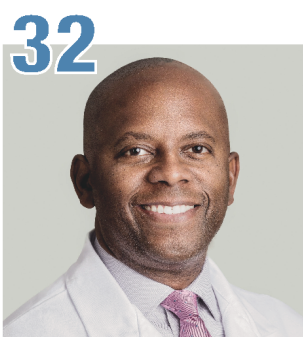


- 32
- Increase pay for teachers & quality of teacher's education

Common sense gun laws that don't interfere with the 2nd Amendment

Raise min. wage to \$15/hr

Supporter of Green New Deal



- 32
- Pass loan forgiveness

Reinstate assault rifle ban, support gun control policies because of his trauma surgery background

Pro-abortion, supporter of Roe v. Wade's restoration

Ceasefire once Hamas is defeated, supporter of Israel's military action



- 32
- Provide debt relief

Ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines supporter of gun control policies

Guarantee a right to abortion and "bodily autonomy"

Call for a permanent ceasefire



- 32
- Against expansion of 2nd Amendment restrictions

Pro-abortion, supporter of bodily autonomy

Call for ceasefire, not in support of Israel's funding

Affordable housing



- 32
- Ban assault weapons, high-capacity magazines, in support gun-control policies

Pro-abortion

Better screening of immigrants & matching them to jobs



- 32
- Help students who have been taken advantage of by for-profit universities

Supporter of gun control policies, prevent individuals at risk causing harm with a firearm

Pro-abortion, supporter of Roe v. Wade's restoration

Supporter of Israel's military action



- 32
- Affordable college

Supporter of legislative & holistic approach - incentivize communities to fight for stricter gun ownership

Pro-abortion, increase access to contraceptives

Call for ceasefire



- 32
- Supporter of stricter gun control

Pro-abortion

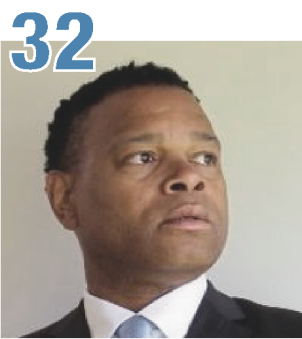
Enhance community safety by offering first responders (police, firefighters) a \$60,000 starting pay

Immigration reform



- 32
- Prohibit assault weapons sale, pass legislations that close loopholes

Pro-abortion, increase access to contraceptives, & preventative health care



- 32
- Pay student athletes, commitment to graduation

A license to carry, gun accountability, training, and awareness

Pro-abortion

Call for ceasefire, not in support of war funding



- 32
- "Educational freedom"- alternative educations

Pro-2nd Amendment, uphold individual liberties

Anti-abortion



- 32
- Pro-2nd Amendment, supporter of providing more support to law enforcement

Anti-abortion, with the exceptions for rape/incest, medical reasons that endanger the mother's life

Supporter of Israel's military action



- 32
- Diversify educational options (vocational, online, apprenticeship) to reduce demand for student loans

Oppose ban on guns and gun-free zones, address root causes, reasonable safety measures

Anti-abortion, except when a mother's life in danger, supporter of assistance for families and pregnant women

Supporter of humanitarian aid for Palestine



- 32
- Expand school choice & educational reform

Pro-2nd Amendment

Anti-abortion

Supporter of Israel's military action

Education

Gun control

Abortion

Israel/Palestine

Other issues

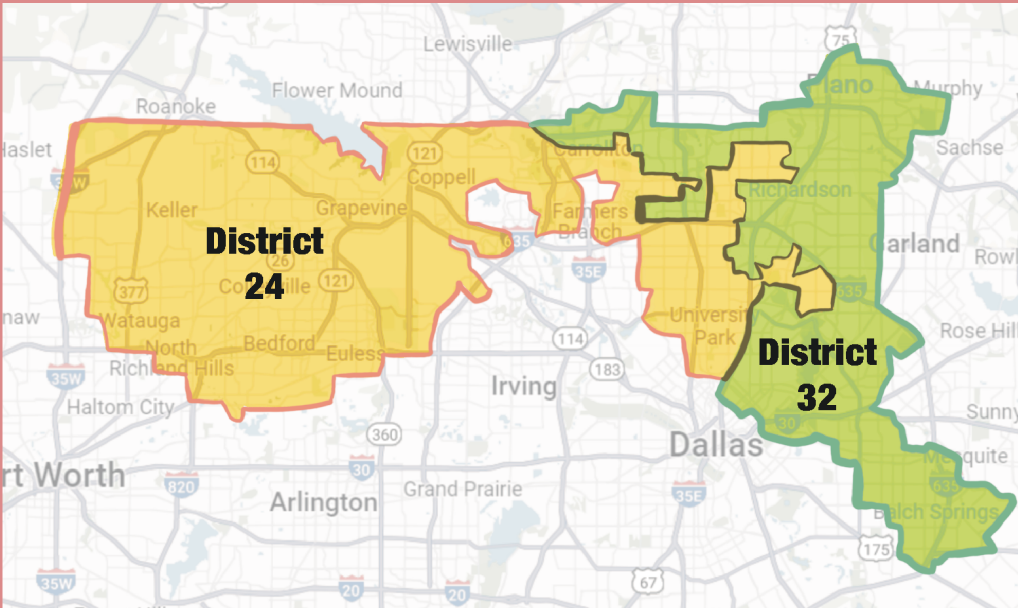
Candidates photos courtesy of Ballotpedia & drbrian-williamsforcongress.com
Map data © Google 2024

Voting dates

Primary
March 5

Primary run-off
May 28

Which district are you in?



Francine Ly

Ly, a former child refugee from Cambodia and now a certified court manager, has lived in Dallas since the age of nine. As a mother herself, Ly is determined to create infrastructure in District 24 to support future generations of children. She hopes to do this by promoting inclusivity, cracking down on gun violence without infringing on the Second Amendment and supporting efforts to lower the student loan interest rate. Above all else, Ly said she plans to run for office because she loves America.

"I have utmost pride and gratitude and love for our country," Ly said. "Commitment, honor, maybe it's just words to them, but those words have meaning for me."

See [utdmercury.com](#) for a full profile on Ly.

Gulrez Khan

Khan, an immigrant from India and former professional cricket player, co-owns American Star Home Health & Hospice Care and Global Consultants of Texas. He also fully owns Gulrez Khan Management, LLC and serves as a GOP precinct chairman. Khan calls for financial literacy in college students and wants to ensure they have clear pathways to careers in order to ease the financial burden of college. He also believes in lowering the tax rate to cultivate a thriving environment for businesses. Khan is staunchly anti-abortion — believing in fetal personhood — and has plans to defund Planned Parenthood if elected. He supports fierce protection of the Second Amendment.

"I feel and believe it's a divinely orchestrated calling in my life to step up and provide the right leadership for Texas District 32," Khan said.

See [utdmercury.com](#) for a full profile on Khan.

Former chess coach and International Master passes away



ANNA PHENGSAKMUEANG | MERCURY STAFF

International Master Rade Milovanovic served UTD's chess program for two decades.

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

International Master Rade Milovanovic, a former long-time chess coach at UTD, passed away from natural causes at the age of 69 on Feb. 3 in Richardson, Texas. His funeral was held at the Restland Wildwood Chapel in Dallas, Texas, on Feb. 10.

During his 20 years at UTD, Milovanovic shaped UTD's success in chess, guiding the university to 10 Pan-American Team Championships, five first-place finishes in the Final Four, 11 Texas collegiate championships, nine national collegiate chess league championships and six Transatlantic Cup victories. Additionally, during his time at UTD, three of his students gained the title of Grandmaster.

While teaching, Milovanovic gained the title of Texas Chess Champion of 1999 and co-champion of the U.S. Open in 2008; he also self-published a memoir — International Chess Mas-

ter: My Family and Chess Story with Selected Games and Pictures.

From a young age, Milovanovic enjoyed chess recreationally. In 1972, at the age of 18, he won the Bosnia and Herzegovina Junior Chess Championship; in 1973, he won a silver medal in the Yugoslavian Junior Chess Championship and a gold medal in the Balkan Junior Chess Championship.

Milovanovic graduated from the University of Belgrade Faculty of Law, serving as a lawyer and a judge in Tuzla, Bosnia-Herzegovina. However, his love for chess only grew as he began traveling and competing internationally, winning first place in Warsaw and Italy before being recognized as an International Master in 1988 at the age of 33.

In 1998, Milovanovic and his family fled Bosnia-Herzegovina during the turmoil that preceded the Kosovo War. They immigrated to Dallas, Texas, where Milovanovic began working

as a church janitor. In time, he rekindled his love for chess by winning the Pan-Am Open in 1998.

Milovanovic joined UTD's chess program in 1999, initially working a trainer who helped players analyze games. He was promoted to the position of coach in 2002 and served the team until he retired in 2019.

In a previous interview with The Mercury discussing his retirement, one of Milovanovic's favorite memories was the Pan-Am in Miami.

"I remember one event in 2003. It was Pan-Am in Miami when we, for the first time, took a clear first place," Milovanovic said. "This was special because we were the underdogs. The team from Baltimore was the heavy favorite, but we somehow beat them."

Milovanovic was a cherished member of UTD's community, developing Comets talent and inspiring those he taught to push for greatness.

FIRE gives UTD a red light, demands Spirit Rocks return

MARIA SHAIKH
Opinion Editor

UTD received a "red light" rating for "substantially restrict[ing] freedom of speech" in the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression's annual "Spotlight on Speech Codes" report.

FIRE's rating follows their Dec. 1 letter to UTD demanding the Spirit Rocks be reinstated and their Jan. 16 blog post urging for the Spirit Rocks' restoration, after Student Affairs' Nov. 20 decision to uproot the Spirit Rocks due to "extended political

discourse." FIRE, an organization focused on protecting First Amendment rights on college campuses, spoke with *The Mercury* in the immediate aftermath of the removal, where they described the university's decision as harmful at best and viewpoint discrimination at worst.

"Removing this forum now over objections to students' political viewpoints about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict constitutes impermissible viewpoint discrimination," FIRE Program Officer Graham Piro wrote in the Dec. 1 letter. "We urge UT Dallas to

restore its Spirit Rocks to their prior location ... while protecting the right to use the rocks for expression of students' choosing."

UTD has received a "red light" rating every year since 2018, defined on the annual report as a university "both clearly and substantially restrict[ing] freedom of speech or [barring] public access to its speech-related policies." Of the nearly 500 universities surveyed for the report, 20% earned a "red light" rating, and three of the 21 Texas schools surveyed earned a "red light" rating. The percentage of institutions receiv-

ing "red light" ratings has been increasing since 2022. This is the second-worst free speech rating a school can receive; the worst is "warning," which FIRE defines as "when a private university clearly and consistently states that it holds a certain set of values above a commitment to freedom of speech."

UTD has also been ranked 114 out of 248 colleges surveyed for FIRE's 2024 Free Speech Rankings. The report, which gathers students' opinions about free speech climates on campus, ranks UTD highly in tolerance for conservative viewpoints, while

its lowest rankings are in "openness" and "comfort."

FIRE has previously marked the sexual harassment section of UTDSP5005, the Student Grievances policy, as red-lighted. It also challenged UTD's 2022 investigation into professor Timothy Farage's homophobic tweets and the 2023 sanctioning of a UTD student who cursed at parking attendants. Both events have been marked as "FIRE victories," as neither individual was punished for constitutionally protected speech.

EROL
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

topics related to UTD for a chance to win Student Government merch and a feature in the AMP Magazine. After the win, Redditors flocked to Shaikh's story with words of support, saying things like "this is so wattpad core (positive)," referring to the popular fanfiction website. Her story presents a satirical commentary on the Spirit Rocks' removal, depicting a dramatic scene where UTD President Richard Benson and Temoc get divorced with a custodial dispute over the Spirit Rocks.

"I thought that my angle would be more interesting because there were plain and simple obituaries and stuff," Shaikh said. "And while I really enjoyed reading them, I didn't think that they took the concept of humanizing and dramatizing the Spirit Rocks far enough. I do think that I was able to write something interesting and intriguing and that left a lot of open ends."

Giana Abraham, neuroscience sophomore and the communications chair for SG, said the name "EROL" was chosen to reference UTD's unofficial tradition of spelling names backwards, as it stands for "lore." Abraham said she sees the competition as a valuable outlet for self-expression.

"A lot of people here, especially on Reddit, I guess love to story tell and love to share little stories," Abraham said. "EROL, at least, was an outlet for that, because there's not many writing competitions on campus."

In "The Divorce," Temoc confronts his lover, Benson, expressing his disbelief and hurt as the UTD president takes away their "children," the Spirit Rocks.

"I like your ideas when they're about engineering," [Benson] growls, canines gleaming in the low light. "Not social justice. Over twenty years and you still couldn't

get that through your head — that's why it's come to this. Now sign the papers and get out of here."

Originally written for the first deadline in December, Shaikh completed her submission in a whirlwind writing session, starting at 11:15 p.m. with the deadline looming at 11:59 p.m. that same day. She described her approach as a sprint to get as many words down as possible, followed by a swift edit.

“ I like your ideas when they're about engineering. Not social justice. Over twenty years and you still couldn't get that through your head — that's why it's come to this. Now sign the papers and get out of here. ”

— Excerpt from "The Divorce"

iting process. Shaikh's love for fanfiction showed in "The Divorce," with comments on her story noting its resemblance to content typically found on platforms like AO3 or Wattpad. Shaikh said she wanted to depict the protagonist, Temoc, immersed in a heart-wrenching confrontation with his partner as their relationship crumbles before his eyes.

"I'm absolutely ecstatic that I got to win, that people thought my silly divorce story was compelling enough to declare a winner," Shaikh said. "But to the authors of the other stories, I absolutely love your work and next time you'll get that win. I'm confident."

Shaikh, though not officially declared, is working towards a history minor, with a special interest in Chinese history, gender dynamics and imperial conflicts. Describing her daily routine, Shaikh said she spends her days engrossed in reading, writing and art, which fuels her passion for the esoteric and strange.

"My passion in my head is the sciences, but my passion in my heart is the humanities," Shaikh said. "I just love weird things."

Shaikh said she was inspired to write the story by Benson's controversial decision to remove the Spirit Rocks on Nov. 20. The winning story was chosen through Reddit upvotes on Student Government's voting thread, where Shaikh's piece beat out the two submissions, "The final moments of TIRPS SKCOR" and "The obituary of beloved Tirips Skcor."

"The Spirit Rocks were one of our bastions of community culture, and they symbolized free speech," Shaikh said. "When that was taken away, a lot of people felt like they were being silenced. I really tried to portray Benson as this heartless, cruel monster who was indiscriminately causing the most pain he could ... I hope that people are able to read that and feel vindicated in their anger towards Benson."

Abraham said that while the submission for the EROL competition was small this year, with only three stories, SG has been working on planning more initiatives this year to give back to the student body and provide more outlets for creative expression.

"I really hope to see this contest grow. We didn't have that many submissions ... I really hope as the semesters go on, it becomes a cemented part of UTD culture, the way the Sex Bowl and iWeek and all those things are," Shaikh said. "I hope next time I'm competing among 30 people instead of just three."

STDs
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

"When it comes to Texas, obviously we have new laws that can make it more difficult for people to secure health-related resources," Rupert said. "On top of that, in our K-12 schools inclusive sex education is not really a priority. And so a lot of those things play into as to why those rates may increase."

There are 861 cases of STDs for every 100,000 people in Dallas, compared to 663 in McAllen. Of the Dallas population, there are 1,034 HIV cases, 29,162 cases of chlamydia, 13,754 cases of gonorrhea and 1,085 cases of syphilis. Eight Texas cities (including Dallas) are ranked in the top 100 highest-transmission cities. These cities include Laredo, San Antonio, Corpus Christi, Austin, Houston, McAllen and El Paso.

Rodriguez said college students are most at risk of contracting diseases through sexual contact, due to a lack of sex education and little emphasis on healthy sexual practices in health-care and media.

"It is the time in life where people become more sexually active and

have a higher frequency of having multiple partners, and so that combined with what's been dubbed by the media as 'hookup culture' is why that age group [college students] is very vulnerable to STDs," Rodriguez said.

Rupert said knowledge and education about STD prevention is critical to preventing STDs. Physical contraceptives — such as male and female condoms — are the first line of defense when protecting yourself from transmitting or receiving STDs while having sex. "The evidence has shown that using a condom is the safest thing you can use," Rodriguez said. "That being said, there's no 100% guarantee and that's why it's so important to get tested. If you are sexually active, then making sure that a condom is used is probably the single most important thing you can do and making sure it's used all the time."

The UTD Student Wellness Center offer condoms and dental dams to students free of charge. In addition to that, UT Southwestern conducts free HIV testing three times a semester on campus. The UTD Health Center also conducts testing year-round

at a heavily discounted price for students.

According to both Rupert and Rodriguez, there's still a stigma surrounding STDs and sex which makes talking about sexual practices uncomfortable. However, they emphasize that having honest conversations about this topic will help normalize it and encourage individuals to access resources to maintain their sexual health.

"Luckily, we live in an age today where many of these are manageable diseases where you can live," Rodriguez said. "It's not a death sentence by any means."

UTD will be hosting "Sex Week" during the week of Valentine's Day, with events geared to reduce stigma against STDs and make students feel comfortable to seek medical help and practice safe sex.

"It's very important to do the work to be sex-positive and have sex-positive conversations," Rupert said. "Someone who may have tested positive for an STD is not dirty. They're not less than any other person. They deserve to live happily and healthily."

GLYDR
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

other FPS games," Warren said. "I found that to be incredibly cool ... it actually gave you a sense of immersion."

Throughout its development under the UTDDesign teams, Glydr underwent numerous iterations as they explored various methods for controlling games with the feet. The process involved extensive experimentation with nine different versions, and three rotating platform concepts. Ultimately, Tett would decide on the current design: a standalone peripheral device intended to complement the keyboard and mouse or game-

pad.

"My favorite part of that entire iterative process he [Tett] walked me through, is that his very first prototype, a wood and metal prototype, is the closest thing to what we have now," Warren said.

After years of development and securing patents in regions from the U.S. to Korea, Glydr is advancing into the later stages of its journey, propelled by \$65,000 raised through the Kickstarter campaign at the time of this article. The product will now enter a new chapter, moving from a design concept, to something actively being marketed and sold to consumers.

"We had high confidence we would get funded in the first day," Tett said, "so it was very pleasant we hit it in the first hour."

As Tett continues with the production of Glydr, he acknowledged the impact and importance of programs like CometX, a six-week entrepreneurship accelerator program that teaches UTD students how to build and scale a startup. After all the teams pitched their ideas for a prize, Tett won in his first semester at UTD.

"When you're young and you have ideas, don't be afraid to pursue them," Tett said.

For every

100k

Dallasites,

861 have

at least 1 STD

Dallas STD Breakdown:

- Chlamydia 65%
- Gonorrhea 31%
- Syphilis 2%
- HIV 2%

Tips to stay safe:

- Abstinence
- Stay educated
- Use a condom/dental dam
- Get tested

RAINIER PEDERSON | MERCURY STAFF

Portable lactation pod provides privacy for nursing mothers, courtesy of the Office for Campus Resources and Support



The LilyPad lactation pod is located on the first floor of the Student Union, near the Student Media suite, and can be accessed by downloading the Mamava app. The space is being monitored by OCRS for misuse.

The Office for Campus Resources and Support introduced a LilyPad lactation pod to the Student Union's first floor in the beginning of the spring 2024 semester, providing a convenient space for pumping and breastfeeding.

The first of its kind at UTD, the pod is designed for lactating mothers to nurse

children or express breastmilk in comfort and privacy. It is part of UTD's preexisting and campus-wide system of LilyPad lactation spaces, but it is designed as a portable "pod" instead of a room. The pod is available for students to access as long as the Student Union is open through the Mamava app, available on Apple and Android. As of Feb. 8, a sign near the pod's entrance warns against us-

ing the pod for other purposes, saying “[OCRS] is monitoring this space if it’s being misused for ... sleeping [or] studying.”

“Users have indicated a need for more lactation spaces on campus, as well as availability after normal office hours,” OCRS Vice President Yvette Pearson said in an email. “Given space constraints, we decided to try the pod.”



LEFT: SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF RIGHT: KATYA ZAKARIAN | MERCURY STAFF

OCS said the SU was chosen to house the first lactation pod because of its central location on campus and long hours of operation, which allow easy access without disrupting classes, work or extracurriculars. UTD Facilities maintains the pod alongside other LilyPad spaces across campus.

The pod may switch locations and further lactation pods may be added to

LilyPad lactation rooms are currently available in JSOM, BSB, AD, Founders, ECSW, Synergy Park North 2 and the Galerstein Community Center in SSB. The OCRS website lists exact room numbers and operating hours.

THE MERCURY

**IF YOU FEEL SOME TYPE
OF WAY ABOUT THIS LAYOUT,**

THE MERCURY

[Blank blue rectangular box]

[Large blank pink rectangular box]

then you should 
become a **layout artist**.

Help Us Make It Better



Scan to
apply



Scan to
apply

WIND

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

However, without a wave pool, UTD cannot fully simulate offshore conditions.

"These experiments are very necessary to further the industry of wind energy ... The winds are much higher, which gives us an opportunity to capture the wind ... it would be a game changer to open that up," Reeves said.

Comets interested in renewable energy can join the Wind Energy club advised by Griffith, which current president and EE senior Fernando

Harmjanz said is beginner friendly as most members are self-taught. Students of all majors can join connect to internships with engineering firms or projects. Finally, students can participate in a summer wind energy research experience under the direction of mechanical engineering professor Stefano Leonardi.

"We want the students to reach out to us ... we need talented students that can execute projects. And there is a tremendous interest at the national level in terms of providing funding and opportunities for doing this," Rotea said.

LAW
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3

law school, and I was like, that's the perfect picture of our major," Hatfield said. "The student wrote a book of poems and is ready to go as a great law student."

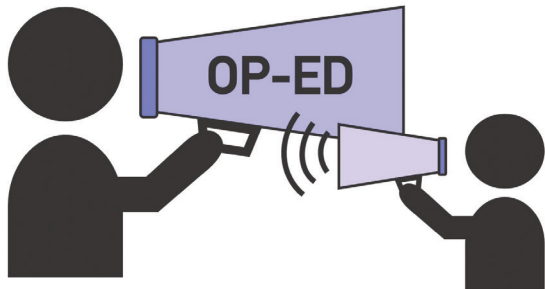
The concentration was first conceptualized in spring 2022 by Hatfield and American Studies professor Larissa Wehrhnyak, bringing together existing faculty and courses for a new purpose. The only new class, RHET 4320, will be taught by a practicing lawyer hired as part-time UTD staff.

Hatfield said the concentration's target audience is students who want to be strong law school candidates and critical thinkers, as well as students interested in other related occupations like paralegal work.

“The third audience might be ... somebody [who] might think, ‘I’m interested in the law, I don’t wanna be a lawyer, and I love literature. This is a cool way to do all those things before I go off and pursue a different kind of career,’” Hatfield said.

According to Serenity King, associate vice president for institutional success and decision support, UTD’s Academic Senate approved the pre-law program last semester to begin in fall 2024. If the program is incorporated into UTD’s course catalog before then, students will be able to take the concentration in the fall.

Students interested in the pre-law concentration should contact Hatfield or literature academic advisor, Cynthia Lara.



The Mercury publishes op-ed submissions in an effort to reflect a wide variety of campus perspectives. Topics or the opinion reflected in the op-ed should be relevant to a college or local audience. Apart from your name and photo, personal info will not be published. *The Mercury* reserves the right to reject any submission and to edit op-eds for clarity, brevity, accuracy and to prevent libel. Email op-eds to opinioneditor@utdmercury.com.

BAD ROMANCE: TALES OF HEARTBREAK

Comets reveal tales of heartbreak and horror including arranged marriages gone wrong and discovering swastikas in Minecraft servers



KAVYA RACHEETI
Mercury Staff

It's the text that no person in a relationship wants to receive. And while breakups are almost always painful at first — no matter which side you're on — time can soften the messiest drama into a funny story. And when you date a UTD student, the stories get even funnier.

While the poll expressed that some breakups ended because of lighthearted reasons, not all of the respondents' relationships ended amicably. For example, criminology senior Venice Osorio said that their relationship came to an end when they found out their ex had built a swastika in his Minecraft world.

"He had this dungeon thing in his Minecraft world that was underground, and it was like hell," Osorio said. "He had just different symbols like a pentagram. All that is fine, but then when I saw the swastika was on fire, I was like oh, you can't have this here."

Osorio met their ex in their junior year of high school, when both were in their high school's choir program.

"We had one of those relationships that was like the really gross people in high school who make out in the hallway," Osorio said. "Just completely embarrassing."

The infatuation between the two didn't last, as Osorio recounts other "red flags" in their relationship.

"He didn't really like it when I hung out with his friends and I later found out [the reason was] because they knew that he was cheating on me," Osorio said. "There were things that didn't add up or he'd blow things out of proportion that like were not obviously not a big deal to anyone but him, you know."

The end of Osorio's relationship altered their perspective on how relationships would work by introducing new boundaries and preferences they'd want in a relationship.

"What I didn't want was like another relationship where there's a power imbalance and like, where I'm the person constantly seeking attention and affection and the other person who's holding it above my head," Osorio said. "A lot of our relationship was spent [with], like, him saying or doing offensive things and then me trying to fix him."

However, it's not just young people that have relationship drama. With time, messy relationships become messy marriages and, often, messy divorces. One poll respondent in the survey detailed their marriage and its bitter end.

"It was an arranged marriage so we had been set up and agreed to marry each other, but it was not what desis would call a 'love match'. His family lied about approving of me and after we got married actively worked to convince him to leave me."

Though breakups are the end of a relationship, that doesn't mean they have to be the end of your life. Slowly, but surely, you'll begin to move on to newer and happier chapters. Osorio warns those who wish to enter a new relationship to seek internal happiness before all else. Osorio also advises to stay away from resuming romantic relationships you've already had, citing the sentiment that if it doesn't work the first time, it most likely will not work again.

"19, 20 year olds, they're way too young to have a relationship that requires them to fight for it," Osorio said.

A whole new world of flavors with a side of service woes at Aladdin Café

AAFIYA ASLAM
Mercury Staff

Aladdin Cafe's warm and inviting atmosphere begins at its front door, with staff welcoming you as you enter, and is only enhanced by the abundance of Disney's "Aladdin"-themed decor and silverware, but the service and food offerings leave much to be desired.

Located 13 minutes from campus and recently opened in December 2023, the cafe is open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. from Sunday to Thursday and 10 a.m. to midnight from Friday to Saturday. If you are worried about price, be sure to bring your Comet Card for Aladdin Cafe's 15% student discount. To receive the best service possible, make sure you arrive early when the baked goods are fresh. Along with their sweets and typical cafe fare, they serve a variety of beverages such as hot tea, hot coffee and chocolate, iced lattes, fresh juices and cold smoothies. Between

10 a.m. and 12 p.m., the cafe offers Middle Eastern breakfast options, and if you come during the evening, they will have dinner options.

Aladdin Cafe offers a variety of drinks ranging from tea to coffee, with both hot and cold varieties. My favorite was the lemon mint smoothie, which had the perfect amount of tartness and freshness. Although a hefty \$7 for a medium smoothie, the quality justified the cost, and it was larger than a normal medium drink. I also enjoyed the \$6 desert tea, which has just enough aromatic spices to give it a sense of warmth.

The cafe also offers an array of pastries and sweets — my favorite was the lagoon rolled cake, consisting of coffee filling and whipped cream with pistachio and a flower for garnish. The moist \$5 cake is available in other flavors, including vanilla and chocolate. I also enjoyed the jasmine brioche rolls, which are fluffy on the in-

side and crispy on the outside.

In addition to desserts and beverages, Aladdin Cafe also offers light meals. My favorite was the \$9 fries sandwich, which is just as marketed on the menu — fries with coleslaw in a sandwich. I also tried the \$10 crazy kumpir, which consists of baked potato filled with a salad of your choice, but the ingredients for this dish weren't as fresh.

For the breakfast options, there was the Aladdin Tray, which is a four-person brunch containing vegetables, hard-boiled eggs, cheese and gravy. If you are going for a heavier breakfast for four, then try the Jasmin Mix which has sides of cheese, scrambled eggs and different types of meat. Lastly, if you want to eat alone, try the Genie Breakfast, which contains scrambled egg with meat, dried fruits, vegetables, one type of cheese, bread and



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

Inspired by Disney's "Aladdin," Aladdin Café offers a thematic charm, strategic location by campus and student discounts alongside service troubles.

SEE ALADDIN, PAGE 12



MARK GUERRA | COURTESY

Alumnus Mark Daniel Sampelo is pictured alongside other visitors attending the Lone Star Palengke, which is a Filipino Market held annually in the DFW region.



MARK GUERRA | COURTESY

Sampelo is founding a Filipino Community Center and the first ever Filipinotown in North Texas.

Mark Sampelo makes mark

ANDRÉ AVERION
Mercury Staff

Mark Daniel Sampelo, a 2016 UTD marketing alumnus, is inspiring hope by preserving an underrepresented identity in DFW through founding a Filipino Community Center and the first ever Filipinotown in North Texas.

Sampelo said he was inspired by God to create a sustainable community home and legacy for Filipinos in North Texas. In 2022, he shared this idea with cofounders of the nonprofit Pilipino American Community Endeavor, or PACE, which has since focused on community service, networking with small business owners and nonprofits and hosting Filipino town hall meetings.

Currently, PACE is talking with the cities of Allen, Grand Prairie and Frisco about plans to build a Filipinotown supporting local businesses, restaurants and education in the next 10 years. This \$2.2 million project is made possible through donations and the Lone Star Palengke community event, with PACE's most recent efforts including a partnership with the Dallas Mavericks where a portion of proceeds from the April 7 game against the Houston Rockets goes to the community.

"I want to leave it better for the people that are going to follow," Sampelo said. "God put in my heart, [saying] 'hey, you're back in Dallas. There's a growing community. And I made you this way because I want you to lead my people.' And for me, I'm Filipino, so I gotta leave it Filipino."

The DFW area has about 80,000 Filipinos, according to the 2020 census, making up nearly 58% of the Filipinos in Texas. Despite

the fact that Filipinos are the third most populous Asian ethnicity in the U.S., Texas lacks a dedicated center for Filipino culture, in comparison to Carrollton's Koreatown or Richardson's Chinatown.

"We started interviewing some of the elders here in Dallas, and we found out, you know, [Filipinos] been here for 50 plus years," Sampelo said.

Sampelo co-founded the largest annual Filipino market festival in Texas, the Lone Star Palengke, which brought together over

If our community is hurting and we're not helping them, then what are we doing?"

However, Sampelo's story of raising the status quo for Filipinos began much earlier than PACE. Sampelo spent the first five years of his life with his grandparents in Cavite, Quezon in the Philippines, only seeing his parents Jerry and Anna Faye every Christmas; they worked as Overseas Filipino Workers in Saudi Arabia. Eventually his family found a home in Dallas, where he enrolled at UTD.

"A lot of the reason I'm here is from my parents' sacrifice. They did everything for us, and I just wanted to be at home, and I saw how reputable UTD was," Sampelo said.

In his senior year he became an influential president of the UTD Filipino Student Association (FSA), starting several traditions like field days, bringing in Filipino alumni speakers, the recitement of the Philippines National Anthem, the Filipino word of the day and balikbayan donation boxes.

"I wanted to make sure as a leader that I put back the Filipino in FSA," Sampelo said. "What's funny is the majority of folks aren't Filipino. I think what's universal is that, just one of the core Filipino root values, is kapwa. That's your ability to see yourself in another-finding that connection and finding that oneness. It's very divine, and I think that's why there's such an attraction to FSA. You don't have to be Filipino."

In 2016 Sampelo graduated from JSOM, but for nearly a year, he couldn't find employment in his industry. He referred to this period as a blow to his confidence and a time of struggle.

SEE **SAMPELO**, PAGE 12

“How do we prepare the next generation so that, when we're gone, they're able to see themselves?”

— Mark Daniel Sampelo

10,000 visitors in October 2023, to meet 120 local Filipino vendors, artists and performers. The festival included 2022 Miss Texas and 2024 Democratic candidate for the Texas House, Averie Bishop.

"We wanted to be intentional. We wanted to show that the community was here," Sampelo said. "We invited all the Filipino business owners, Asian American minorities, Black, Latino. We made it affordable for them and then gave them exposure. We invited the nonprofits for free resources to the community because we also have to pour into our community.



PHOTO: MARK DANIEL SAMPELO | COURTESY

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: KATHERVYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR

The Slants share history fighting for free expression

Simon Tam and Joe Jiang shared an evening of music and passion with Comets on Feb. 2. They were invited on campus by Dean of EPPS

SOFIA MEINARDUS
Mercury Staff

Quentin Tarantino and Simon Tam — one iconic filmmaker and one visionary musician with seemingly no relation — ignited a controversial band name and a case for trademark rights that found its way to the Supreme Court. Spanning almost a decade, The Slants' journey from courtroom warriors to concert hall champions unfolded at the University Theater.

Hosted by the School of Economic Political and Policy Sciences, The Slants performed on Feb. 2, 2024. Led by author and musician Simon Tam and guitarist Joe X. Jiang, the rock synthpop band shared their quest for trademark protection on their band name in a dazzling fusion of songs and storytelling. After the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office denied protection to the band's name in 2013, citing it as offensive to people of Asian descent, the band pursued legal action, with Tam appealing the decision and eventually bringing the case to the Supreme Court.

"At the end of the day, I got to do

more than I ever imagined was possible," Tam said. "And now we can effect change in a much bigger way than ever thought possible through our nonprofit and things like that," Tam said. "For that, I'm very very happy."

The concert served as a stage for the duo to showcase their unique narrative. Tam said the name was inspired by an iconic scene in Tarantino's film "Kill Bill," the first time Tam saw Asians depicted as powerful in a major American film. His determination to challenge stereotypes was born from this lack of representation of Asian Americans in mainstream media. Thus, The Slants emerged, with the name coining a feature Tam noted many Asians have — slanted eyes.

Against a backdrop of pulsating cerulean and vibrant purple lights, the dimming lights promptly signaled the start of the concert at 6:10 p.m. and a blanket of quiet fell over the audience. The Slants were not just another band — they were on a mission. This was not merely a concert; it was a convergence of art, activism and defiance against cultural stereotypes, with each chord resonating in an

unwavering spirit and commitment to their cause. Tam and Jiang unleashed a torrent of raw emotion and unapologetic authenticity as the performance was accompanied by a slideshow in the background, supplementing the narrative with a short scene from the Tarantino film that motivated Tam, pictures of the band at the Supreme Court performing and facts relating to their case.

One of the standout moments came during the song "From the Heart." This song, which expresses themes of defiance and resistance, served as a letter to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, which the Slants performed on the steps of the Supreme Court in while fighting for their trademark in 2017. Tam instructed the audience to say "no" every time he pointed to them, allowing the members and the audience to sing together and feel the sense of defiance in this upbeat song. The Slants won their case *Matel v. Tam* in June 2017, with the Supreme Court affirming the band's right to trademark their name.

SEE **THE SLANTS**, PAGE 12



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

The Slants performed songs such as "From the Heart," expressing pertinent themes of defiance and resistance. They played this song on the steps of the Supreme Court while fighting for their trademark in 2017.

龙眼

DRAGON EYE

PAOLA MARTINEZ
Mercury Staff

“Dragon Eye” is an immersive video installation capturing the religious traditions and daily labor of the Miao ethnic group in China, open in SP/N through the end of the month.

This installation was built from the travels and ethnography research of UTD professor Thomas Riccio capturing the traditions and ways of life of the Miao people. The art exhibit is open from Jan. 26 to March 2 at the SP/N Gallery. “Dragon Eye” includes picture slideshows, videos and auditory media that invites the viewer to see the Miao’s everyday lives. The exhibit developed when Riccio was asked by a director of the SP/N if he had anything he wanted to show, and he decided to submit a collection of his videography

and ethnographic research. All the different clips in the exhibit are located in separate places and not in chronological order, so the viewer must explore the exhibit in order to get the full story.

“The idea is that you have to put it together yourself,” Riccio said. “So it’s highly personalized. It kind of forces an interaction, like a technological ritual in a sense.”

The Miao people are one of the 56 recognized ethnic groups in China, living primarily in southern China’s mountains. Many clips show shamans conducting rituals and beautiful mountainous scenery highlighting the Miao’s connection to the earth and their loyalty to tradition in a highly modernized world.

“My intent was basically to show the Miao life and how integrated their ritual

and spirituality was with daily life,” Riccio said. “And also [to] show the diversity of daily life, and to show that they’re in transition. A lot of the traditional cultures around the world are evaporating because of globalization, internet, technology, et cetera.”

In conjunction with the video and audio presented at the exhibition, there are also textiles pieces depicting the Chinese Communist Party and ordinary members of the Miao community. Some clips also showed pictures of historical figures of the CPC inside Miao people’s homes.

Riccio’s first experience with the Miao community was in 2001 out of chance when a roommate of his, who was Miao, invited him to travel to China. Ever since, Riccio has returned several times to film

content about the Miao. Riccio had extra footage after creating a 20-minute documentary and while piecing clips together for a full-length one, he decided to use some of those clips to show his research in ethnography, or the study of a culture.

“This specific project, the director of the gallery, Danielle, asked me about a year ago if I like to do something,” Riccio said. “And so, I devised this [the installation]. My performance score by theater work is very immersive and site specific, so I kind of modeled [it] after that, like simultaneous actions.”

The “Dragon Eye” art exhibit hopes to make ethnographic galleries fun and interactive and to be aware of the way we treat ethnic and indigenous minorities, such as the Miao.

“Be aware of the suppression,” Riccio said. “And the fact that the world is transitioning very quickly. What they [Miao] do is essentially embody their rituals and their songs, and the earth, and basically speak to Earth.”



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF



KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF

Left: Recordings of Miao people going about their lives are paired with videos of the geographic region the Miao inhabit. Middle: Two individuals stand next to each other as they observe one of the videos in the Dragon Eye exhibition. Right: Three paintings featuring Mao Zedong hang from a white wall while block cloth drapes beneath them.

KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR



PHOTOS BY KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR

CONTEXTS AND COMMUNITIES: PHOTOGRAPHS OF TOGETHERNESS

HYUN LIM
Mercury Staff

The Contexts & Communities art exhibition, open at SP/N from Jan. 26 to March 2, includes a large archive of photographs that create a nostalgic feeling in viewers by centering themes of community and familial bonds.

The exhibition features photographs from the Comer Collection, which was created by retired engineer Jerry Comer. Curator and PhD student Rebecca Cai picked the exhibition’s current theme — Contexts & Communities — and selected all relevant photographs from the collection. Cai included text descriptions next to each piece of artwork to tell its story and show its place in the exhibition.

Comer gave his collection to UTD in 2010, giving an opportunity each year for PhD students to curate an exhibition by selecting a subset of its photos based on a central theme. As a serious amateur photographer who has won eight Best in Show awards from the State Fair of Texas and the city of Richardson, Comer said he acquires photographs mainly through the photography auctions held at Heritage Auctions.

“I’ve been collecting photos for a long time,” Comer said. “I had some that were quite valuable that were just under a bed, and it concerned me that when we will be away from the house on vacation or something, that if there was a fire, they’d be destroyed. So I gave them to UTD.”

Having to choose from many photos in the Comer Collection, Cai said she was interested in the idea of

communities, as they depict a wide range of subjects. The exhibition contains photos of social networks including families and neighborhoods and focuses on the importance of human connection.

“Context and communities can mean different things,” Cai said. “[Internal contexts] can mean [how] the photo is cropped so some have a wider frame, so it may have a different effect [on the audience]. External context [such as] captions or labels are being used to talk about these people [in the photos], and how all these things are kind of connected.”

Cai brought out the importance of these social connections in the exhibit by placing together photographers who knew each other in real life. For example, photographer Dorothea Lange is placed next to Marion Post Wolcott, both of whom were a part of the Farm Security Administration, or FSA, an agency founded during the Great Depression to document and alleviate rural poverty in the U.S. Other artists groupings center around members of the Photo League — a New York co-op that documents social causes — as well as the Magnum Photographers — an international co-op founded in the 1940s.

The main image in the exhibition is a photograph by Bill McDowell, who is also a part of FSA, called “Diptych.” Cai said this image is the starting point for the exhibition since the story behind the picture is a re-contextualization of photographic meaning. According to the Context & Communities pamphlet, FSA’s goal was to promote the New Deal and help communities displaced in the Dust Bowl. “Diptych” consists of two



KATHERYN HO | GRAPHICS EDITOR

photographs placed side by side: Mr. Tronson, Farmer Near Wheelock ND from Russel Lee in 1936 and Detail of Untitled, Alabama from Walker Evans in 1936. Both photographs have black holes punched in them, as the FSA director deliberately damaged 100,000 out of the 270,000 negatives in an attempt to keep them from being published.

The hole-punched pictures have been recontextualized and now represent a new meaning through their new display. According to the Context & Communities pamphlet, “the black holes can be perceived as an abstraction and re-imagined to be circular portals that connect the view to post-Depression America.” Gallery Manager Brian Scott said that his personal favorite pic-

SEE **CONTEXTS**, PAGE 12



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF



SURJADITYA SARKAR | MERCURY STAFF

SAMPELO
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

With the help of a fellow alumnus, Sampelo started his journey as one of the top 3% financial advisors at Northwestern Mutual. Today he helps 120 families find financial literacy and stability, with 92% of his clientele being minorities, Sampelo said.

Around the same time, Sampelo co-founded Uni-Pro Texas in Houston, a nonprofit that connects the Filipino American community through collaboration, advocacy and education. While he has since passed the torch, this organization became the launchpad for programs like the Southern Intercollegiate Filipino Alliance, which helps Filipino student professionals step into leadership roles.

“How are we going to grow as a community if we don’t invest into the future? How do we prepare the next generation so that, when we’re gone, they’re

THE SLANTS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

Associate Dean Douglas Dow shed light on the controversy surrounding the band’s name, emphasizing its deliberate provocation and its significance as a punk rock gesture. Dow said that the band’s reclamation of the term “slant” could spark discussions on the power of language and the complexities of cultural representation at UTD.

“Thinking about what it means to represent one’s self ... All of us get hurt by words, all of us feel limited by words, all of us have spoken in ways with intent or an absence of intent to hurt others,” Dow said. “Who we are as social beings is bound up with language and names. I see a very real connection between this issue and a lot of the debates that are going on on campus, in communities, in churches and across the nation regarding pronouns and whether or not individuals should represent or should respect another’s request to be addressed using the pronouns of their choice.”

Tam’s reflections on his journey from childhood to the music industry maverick emphasized The Slants’ unwavering commitment to beliefs and passion for

CONTEXTS
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

“[Diptych] is a collaboration over time,” Scott said. “The photographer went out and took these pictures, the editor hated them, punched a hole through them and a person who printed these did this [and] those are three different points in time, not related to each other, where this piece was built. It’s also like evolution in your life. These things change over time. They’re affected by other things, but it’s not a conscious effect.”

The photograph “Migrant Mother” by Dorothea Lange explores the theme of home, showing a displaced mother who has worked hard to support her

able to see themselves?” Sampelo said. “We wanted to build the next generation of leaders, and we understood a lot of wisdom comes from learning from other people’s experiences.”

One lesson Sampelo mentioned building upon was the shortcomings of the largely unknown Philippines Community Center in South Dallas, which was the first of its kind in North Texas. Built by People Caring for the Community Inc., it’s become largely inactive today due to poor outreach, resourcing and an undesirable location. For Sampelo, this inspires hope for what advocacy can look like, and how to overcome the challenges of the past.

“If there’s no seat at the table, why not make your own table?” Sampelo said.

Anyone interested in donating or getting involved with PACE’s Filipino Community Center can donate to their Zeffy page or reach out to Pamela@pacedfw.co.

social justice. In a poignant moment, Tam shared his struggles with discrimination and bullying, laying bare the raw vulnerability beneath the bravado. It was a reminder that behind the glitz and glamour of the stage, The Slants were fighting a deeply personal battle — one that resonated with each member of the audience, inspiring a sense of solidarity and purpose. For UTD students and attendees, The Slants’ narrative served as a poignant reminder of the importance of standing up for one’s beliefs and embracing one’s identity.

The band remains committed both to creativity and to social change, with an upcoming tour for Slanted: An American Rock Opera as well as ongoing initiatives with The Slants Foundation, their nonprofit.

“Everyone has a story to tell, and that story is valuable,” Tam said. “I found that a lot of people, especially Asian Americans or anyone who’s been bullied or felt like an outsider could understand what we go through ... we all know what it feels like to be belittled or cut in half. “You can do something about this. You have agency and it’s worth enduring the difficulties, to do it. So that’s why I tell my particular story.”

children despite being burdened by the struggles of everyday life. According to Cai, this photo shows how photography has been used to garner public support through government aid programs by depicting conditions of poverty.

“I was hoping that the [audience] would walk away with the feeling that they were able to find some photos they were able to connect with,” Cai said. “I was [also] hoping the text portions [in the exhibition] provided an educational component where they were able to see the beginning of photography and hopefully, they will get a sense that photographers are working in dangerous situations and the shift between the past and contemporary photography.”



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF



AAFIYA ASLAM | MERCURY STAFF

ALADDIN
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

hummus.

As for the atmosphere, Aladdin Cafe is best visited alone. The place would be too chaotic if you come in with a group, since they may get overwhelmed and mess up your orders. Due to the high demand, many menu options sell out quickly, which can lead to wait times up to 30 minutes. Regardless of how long we had to wait, the staff were kind and understood our frustration.

As for the service, the staff failed to direct me to my table or inquire about my reservation de-

tails until I located it myself. I arrived in a party of eight, and despite being assured a waiter would find us upon seating, we were left unattended, leading me to observe others placing their orders at the register in which I did the same. Despite appreciating the waiter’s recommendations, the service lacked consistency, resulting in order discrepancies and prolonged wait times, with apparent favoritism toward other customers.

While Aladdin Cafe offers a charming and nostalgic theme and some noteworthy dishes, its inconsistent service and lack of attention to the orders detract from the overall experience.



Starting February 11th

LISTEN LIVE

Every Sunday from **10am-11am** on **RadioUTD!**

Or watch recorded episodes on *UTD-TV* or *The Mercury* website.

STUDENT GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

SPRING 2024

Filing Opens
Feb. 19, 8 a.m.



Filing Closes
Feb. 28, 11:59 p.m.

Campaigning
March 4

Speed Campaigning
March 20, 11 a.m.- 2:30 p.m. Chess Plaza

Executive Debate
March 25, 7-9 p.m. SSA Auditorium

Ballot Open
April 1-3



RAVEN FLIES THROUGH THE COURT



AARAV DEV
Mercury Staff

Sophomore guard Raven Busby is taking advantage of her time on the court and scored a career-high 18 points on Jan. 20 and 16 points on Jan. 27, proving herself to be a defensive titan for the team.

Busby, a healthcare studies sophomore, joined the team in her freshman year as a “3-and-D” guard, meaning she specialized in long shots and defense. After a slow start to the season’s first 14 games, she played over 20 minutes in two of the next three games. She posted her two best career performances in those two games. From limited playing time to grieving lost loved ones, Busby dealt with her fair share of struggles through her time at UTD. However, she was able to overcome these challenges and carve out a meaningful role on

her team, playing an important part in multiple wins this season. Busby hopes to build upon her recent success and deliver UTD an ASC title. Women’s basketball head coach Joseph Shotland said Busby has grown significantly over the course of her career, and that he had an optimistic outlook for her future.

“She’s playing with a lot more confidence,” Shotland said. “As long as she continues to play with confidence, good things are gonna happen.”

Busby faced challenges on the court, but the greatest struggle she faced was a personal one. Her maternal grandfather passed away during her freshman season, and her paternal grandfather passed away earlier this year. She continued to play while grieving, a process she described as difficult. Busby said that basketball has been an outlet for her to deal with her grief, helping her avoid loneliness and distracting her from sadness.

“That was probably the hardest moment in my life,” Busby said. “That was the first time I’ve actually had to struggle with grief [and] learn how to navigate it.”

Busby and Shotland both described her play style as aggressive. Busby said she tries to adhere to her role on offense as a driver and three-point shooter while being intense on defense. She has an impressive record in shooting, recording a 5-11 from deep and 21-22 from the free throw line this season.

“I feel like it’s knowing your place and knowing how you are as a player,” Busby said. “I don’t try to make it too extravagant.”

Shotland described Busby as full of personality, despite initially seeming

soft-spoken. He said she is an enjoyable presence on the team and has a great sense of humor.

“She’s actually a sneaky good dancer, it’s always funny to watch her on the sideline joke around and be goofy,” Shotland said. “She brings a lot of personality to our team and she’s an awesome kid to have on our roster.”

Busby described her academic life as rigorous, having to balance a tough schedule with basketball. She praised the sense of community at UTD, as well as the campus and faculty, having made most of her friends through university and athletic events.

“I’m doing healthcare studies on a pre-dental track, so it’s been really tough juggling all these labs and sciences and math along with basketball,” Busby said. “But I do really like the teaching style here ... you can’t walk through everything, you have to try.”

Despite not playing in the game, Busby’s most memorable moment of her UTD career was winning the ASC championship game 63-57 against East Texas Baptist in her freshman year.

“We were going through a lot of adversity with my team in general,” Busby said. “We knew we were supposed to be there, and we just executed greatly. And that was one of the most fun moments in my life.”

Busby said she was proud of how the team has performed this year and was hopeful for the future.

“I think we have a lot of potential ... the sky’s the limit for us,” Busby said. “I think the season is gonna be special.”

UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY

Comets bounce back with a series of wins

The men's and women's basketball teams respectively stand in second and third place within their ASC conference groups

AARAV DEV
Mercury Staff

The UTD men’s basketball team defeated the Ozarks twice as well as McMurry and Hardin-Simmons, before a loss on Feb. 8, bringing them to second place in the American Southwestern Conference. A victory on Feb. 10 against Concordia Texas has maintained UTD’s standing. The women’s team’s seven-game winning streak came to an end after losing against HSU on Feb. 3, followed by two wins in subsequent games.

The men’s team played in several back-and-forth close games, including games against Howard Payne, McMurry, and HSU. Senior guard Donovan Souter led the Comets in scoring in each of the five games, including a career-high 33 points against McMurry. Junior guard Luke Kiser had back-to-back double doubles against McMurry and HSU. Junior Rob Wade contributed double-digit points in four of the five games. UTD’s offense has been clicking lately, and combined with their improved defense and ability to reach the free throw line, the team has a solid track record for winning.

“We were making tough shots and our ball movement was pretty good,” freshman forward Jordan Balderaz said. “We were con-

stantly crashing the glass and getting second opportunities.”

The women’s team won comfortably against HPU 77-63. They then played a blowout victory against the Ozarks 78-51. The Comets had another easy win against McMurry 70-57, but finally fell to second-ranked HSU after falling behind early and eventually losing 77-66. Senior forward Alex Bowman had double-digit points in all five games, including a career-high 23 against HSU. Sophomore forward Addy Self had a double-double against HSU and a career-high five assists against McMurry. The Comets have been playing well on all fronts, but their defense has set the pace for their games.

“We came out with a lot of defensive intensity,” junior guard Cierra Trigg said. “All our games defense tends to lead the way.”

For the men’s team, their 99 points against HPU was their second highest point total this season. Their offense has caught fire as of late, exceeding 75 points in each of the last five games.

The Comets have played multiple close games in their recent home stretch, with four of their past six games ending in single digit differences, including two one-point games. Balderaz said there is a lot of pressure created in these close, late-game situations.

“Go out there and execute and just have faith in our teammates and coaching staff,” Balderaz said. “Trust that the hours and practice that we’re putting in isn’t for nothing.”

Free throws have been a large part of the Comets’ recent success; they have taken at least 25 in four of their five games, including a season-best 26-33 against the Ozarks.

“If you win the free throw battle, you have a chance to win the game,” men’s basketball head coach Jared Fleming said. “We work on [free throws] every day and it’s something that wins basketball games.”

The Comets’ defense has played a big role in their win streak, restricting their opponents to below 70 points in both Ozarks games and the HSU game.

“We held him in the sixties... which is a testament to our defense,” Fleming said. “I thought the guys were focused and locked in and that we overall did a really nice job.”

The women’s team’s hot streak has depended strongly on defense, with the Comets holding their opponents to under 58 points in four of their last five victories.

“It starts with us going hard in practice,” Trigg said. “We think our defense will lead to us scoring and ... if the other team can’t score then it’s all gonna work out.”

Against HPU, sophomore guard Raven



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

Busby scored a career-high 18 points and had two boards, two assists, a block and two steals.

“We communicated really well defensively,” Busby said. “We could put a nail in their season and get ourselves at the top of the bracket where we need to be.”

The women’s team is doing well distributing the ball; multiple players have reached double-digit points in each of the five games.

With three games left after Thursday be-

fore the ASC championship tournament, the men’s team looks to continue their hot streak, as they have won five of their last six games. The women’s team will look to do the same and maintain their stellar home record.

“The whole goal is staying focused, you can’t worry about the last game, you gotta play the next game,” Fleming said. “I think we’re really coming into our own right now.”

Basketball star one year after graduation

After leaving the court Kyle Poerschke began his own golf apparel brand while growing a social media presence

Arda Trivedi
Mercury Staff

Alumnus Kyle Poerschke has been making a name for himself after leaving collegiate sports through social media, podcasts, and his business Beaver Tail Gang, which has over 26,000 followers on TikTok.

Poerschke graduated from UTD in December 2023 with his master’s in marketing, and while Poerschke may have left the basketball court after establishing a UTD record for most points scored in a single game, his presence in sports lives on digitally. Starting “thebrandretired” with his best friend of two years, Lauren Fulenwider, was a turning point for Poerschke, as both sought new activities after leaving collegiate sports. “thebrandretired” has gathered 206 followers on Instagram and a fanbase on YouTube. “thebrandretired” is a podcast for athletes to find meaning in their journey after retirement from sports.

Poerschke’s main goal with “thebrandretired” was to create a platform to help make the transition from sports to retirement seamless, to help retirees gain confidence that they could live a life

of meaning and fulfillment while acknowledging the role sports has played in it. Additionally, while Poerschke’s main aim was to help retirees, he said he was also healing a part of himself.

“I’ve missed playing basketball, I’ve missed going to practice every day and missed going on trips,” Poerschke said. “And I’ve missed just playing with the guys.”

In addition to this, another goal of the brand was to highlight how athletes can make the most out of a DIII sports experience while emphasizing the importance of mental health.

“Who am I now that I don’t have this sport with me? It’s definitely a part of you that’s gone,” Fulenwider said.

This journey of growth has Poerschke’s endeavors during and after basketball. Starting a golf apparel company with his brother called “Beaver Tail Gang” helped Poerschke connect with his creative drive further and hone into his marketing and business skills. BTG gained a loyal following and sold out in its first cycle in the summer of 2023.

“[BTG’s goal was to] build an apparel brand or something that has to do with sports that sticks,” Poerschke said.

“I’ve missed playing basketball, I’ve missed going to practice every day and missed going on trips. And I’ve missed just playing with the

— Kyle Poerschke

Poerschke’s drive for the sport also shone through interactions with his teammates and coach. According to Terry Butterfield, Poerschke’s coach at UTD, Poerschke’s determination on the court showed through his strong communication and leadership skills. Additionally, the pressure of being a good player never bogged Kyle down. His ability to forge connections on the team quickly became a hallmark

of his character.

“He really bought into our culture and the dynamics of our team,” Butterfield said. And it wasn’t long before Kyle rose through the ranks and became a leader on our team.”

Even in his classes, professors said Poerschke’s ability to adapt to new environments and expand his horizons was evident. He consistently tried to find connections with articles read in class and tried to apply them in his learning process. Poerschke’s game theory professor Ram Rao encouraged him to expand his world view and build awareness of current events. And while Kyle may be assertive on the court, Rao saw humility and boldness in him.

“It’d be easy for him to impose his physical presence ... he came across as approachable ... he always wore a smile on his face,” Rao said.

Poerschke’s journey has not been linear, from basketball to business to videography. His recent internship at NextLevel Thinking, a marketing strategy company, is a testament to his ability to work in leadership roles and adapt to new environments. The imperfections of his past and the promise of have amalgamated to create a society where he not only grows himself but affects others around him



KYLE POERSCHKE | COURTESY

positively.

“He’s always been a great friend to me, he’s a good listener. He’s also just goofy. He doesn’t take life too seriously,” Fulenwider said.

In terms of his work ethic, Poerschke’s determination in the classroom and on the court exudes self-assurance and a hard-working mindset. Throughout Kyle’s time as a basketball player, he has not only forged new connections but held onto old ones. Poerschke’s growth from the highest points scored in one game to taking up new ventures holds promise for all those around him — especially Butterfield.

“He can be a little understated,” Butterfield said. “But listen, he’s got the heart of a lion. And seeing that passion in him doesn’t surprise me at all.”

BASEBALL SEASON OPENS WITH A CRACK OF A BAT

Coach Shewmake remarks on stellar team chemistry as ASC polls predict that UTD will secure second place in upcoming season



“ [Team chemistry] has been outstanding. We’ve got some guys that are back from last year who have been great examples, good leaders and the guys really seem to like each other. It’s a good atmosphere. ”
— Coach Shewmake



TYLER BURKHARDT
Mercury Staff

Coming off a 25-19 season that ended with a third-place finish in the division tournament, UTD baseball is hoping to claim their fourth ASC title in their last season in Division III. ASC’s preseason poll has predicted the Comets will finish second in their division. Next weekend, the Comets will face off against Texas Lutheran university, a strong team that just began their season 4-1 and recently finished their

fifth-straight 25-win season in 2022-23. Head coach Shane Shewmake said UTD is looking forward to the Opening Weekend matchup, which will take place at UTD on Feb. 16 and Feb. 17. “Texas Lutheran is a very good team, but we’ve had some pretty good baseball weather, the guys have been working hard, and we’re ready to get started,” Shewmake said.



GRAPHIC BY: RAINIER PEDERSON | MERCURY STAFF
PHOTOS BY: HRIDYA DHULIPALA | MERCURY STAFF

Softball seniors exemplify elite performance

Alexia Mullen and Olivia Reed discuss how they balance a rigorous academic and atheltic schedule

TYLER BURKHARDT
Mercury Staff

Seniors Alexia Mullen (CITS) and Olivia Reed (biochemistry) are entering their fourth season of softball at UTD. Despite the players being loyal members of the team, both are dedicated to their academics: Mullen is an aspiring data analyst with a 4.0 GPA, and Reed has a 3.98 and is in the process of interviewing for neuroscience PhD programs. Head softball coach Kelly Archer said that this shouldn’t come as a surprise. Both Comets have prepared themselves for prestigious careers after graduation, despite the time commitment to athletics, and they have six academic all-ASC selections between them. Rather than getting in the way of team chemistry, they believe that academic success brings UTD’s softball team closer together. “The hardest part of my job is scheduling, because the players don’t miss class,” Archer said. “That’s what I love the most [about UTD Athletics] – we want to win conference titles, but never at the expense of our academics. We don’t have to compromise.” Angela Marin, the Director of Athletics, said that academic excellence has always been a cornerstone of UTD Athletics. She sees success in collegiate athletics as a

way to facilitate students excelling in higher education, not an objective in lieu of graduation. From the first stages of recruitment, Marin said UTD coaches emphasize academic excellence as a priority for Comet athletes. “That’s what the culture of athletics is like here,” Mullen said. “You prioritize academics. We chose [UTD] for the sake of prioritizing our careers – and softball is a great bonus.” This commitment to academics first also played into Reed’s decision to enroll at UTD. She said that when graduating high school, she looked for softball programs that emphasize academics, since although sports are important to her, the purpose of college is ultimately to prepare students for the real world. “I’ve been interviewing [for PhD programs] and the others that are competing for that spot these grad schools are from Stanford, UCLA, Dartmouth, Columbia, all of these great name schools,” Reed said. “And then you see UT Dallas – me – up there interviewing with these prestigious schools. There’s no doubt: the school does set you up for success.” Marin said that student athletes are extremely vocal about the support they need to excel, whether

it’s delaying the bus ride for an away game to finish a lab project or having to miss practice for class on a specific day of the week. Communication is especially important for students like Reed, as softball isn’t her only extra-curricular commitment on campus. For example, Reed currently works as a research lab assistant in

“ We chose [UTD] for the sake of prioritizing our careers – and softball is a great bonus. ”

— Alexia Mullen

Michael Burton’s neuroimmunology and behavior lab on campus. “Succeeding is all about scheduling and communicating,” Reed said. “Taking hard classes in the fall [because softball season is in

“ The support system we have in the softball team is really amazing-by Sykes. ”

— Oliva Reed

the spring] and being extremely on-top of communicating between my different obligations. In addition to school, last year I did research, softball, and a bartending job – so, to juggle that, if you don’t communicate, it is impossible.”

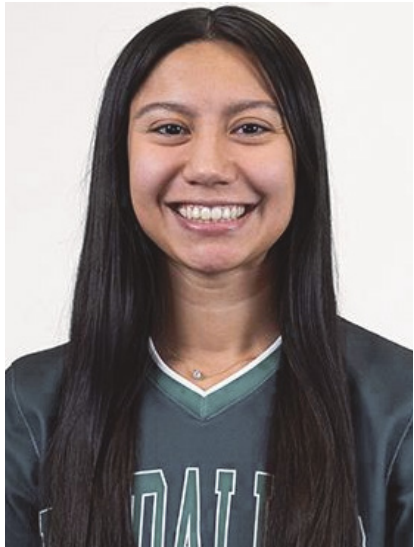
Despite the time commitment, both Reed and Mullen stressed how valuable the softball experience has been to their college career. Mullen described the team as a built-in network of friends, classmates and potential mentors. Part of that she attributes to the Division III, academics-first environment: because the team isn’t competing within itself for scholarships, the players are always encouraging and supporting one another. “The support system we have in the softball team is really amazing,” Reed added. “I’ve been, at times, really frustrated with my work, or down about a grade and they’re right there with me. Like, we’re in it together. Let’s go study, or let’s go do this to take your mind off it.” Support goes both ways – especially for seniors. Reed and Mullen both help tutor other students on the softball team, and see that as part of their role in building a close-knit team culture. “One of our old teammates, Megan Todd, would help me out with my finance classes,” Mullen said. “That went a long way in terms of my learning how to study. Now I help tutor some of my teammates who also have JSOM classes, and that reinforces my learning ... they’re all fun to be around, so we have a good time and get good grades, which is a win-win.” Archer said that he came back to coaching at UTD because of the caliber of students the athletics department attracts – athletes who are focused on their careers after college, but who still want to have a chance to play softball. Mullen and Reed exemplify that perfectly. “Both seniors have balanced athletics and their academics at the highest levels,” Archer said. “This is who we want all of our kids to be: [both] highly academic and highly athletic.”



OLIVIA REED

A senior who has been a member of the softball team since her freshman year.

Reed has maintained a 3.98 GPA and now seeks to pursue a neuroscience graduate degree.



ALEXIA MULLEN

A senior who has been a member of the softball team since her freshman year.

Mullen has maintained a 4.0 GPA as she pursues a career in data analysis.

PHOTOS BY: UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY



UTD CHESS TEAM PLAYS IN KCF CUP

AAFIYA ASLAM
Mercury Staff

Four UTD chess teams made it to the top 10 in their respective categories in the fourth annual Kasparov Chess Federation University Cup, although none qualified for top prizes.

UTD competed at the online chess tournament on Feb. 3 and Feb. 4 against international competitors like Indonesia and Ukraine. The KCF Cup is a nine-round Swiss tournament on Lichess where the time control is 10 minutes with 3 second increment per move. The UTD chess team and club split into four teams – A, B, C and D. Each group was formed based on an ELO ratings cap: U2400, U2200, U2000 and U1800 respectively. Team A placed 6th, Team B placed 4th, Team C placed 3rd, and Team D placed 5th in their respective categories, but none of them were awarded a plaque to take home. Individually, economics junior Ivan Schitco made 6th place and computer science freshman Balaji Daggupati made 7th place overall.

Schitco from Team A said that they were about to play against big teams on both days of the tournament, but due to their two losses and one draw in rounds 2, 6 and 9, they weren't able to play with the top teams. However, he and his team still kept fighting, as he won seven games and drew two.

"If we would have won that [last] round, it would have been a pretty decent result," Schitco said.

During Schitco's games, he played the English opening for the white pieces and e4 and e5 positions for the black pieces. Schitco said that if you know the theory, even if it's from a simple opening, then you can get solid positions throughout the game, which will lead to turnover during endgames. Schitco refers to this play as the "Magnus style."

"I just keep playing a very simple position, and then in the endgame, I

feel like I see a lot of interesting opportunities where people just decide that it's a draw [or possible win]," Schitco said.

During round 6, Schitco played against FM Andriy Prydun from Lviv State University of Physical Culture, and while he felt was at a disadvantage, he was confident he could draw since the position looked equal. However, Prydun blundered during the endgame by playing Bg7

“He made a pretty big mistake... He lost the bishop, basically.”
— Schitco on opponent's strategy

and trapping his bishop, and Schitco secured a win.

"He made a pretty big mistake ... He lost the bishop, basically," Schitco said.

Daggupati from Team B played in the KCF cup for the first time, where he won seven games and drew two. Daggupati mentioned that after a strong day 1 performance, they lost the last two rounds of day 2 and didn't qualify for prizes.

"We were actually tied for first. I think going into the 8th round we're playing one of the strongest teams, and we were very close to upsetting them," Daggupati said. "But in the end, the cards didn't fall in our favor and the last two rounds went awfully for us."

Unlike Schitco's strategy, Daggupati described his play style as "dubious." He favored openings and theory that his opponents weren't familiar with, which helped him win

time during the rapid games. As for his style of play, he tried playing tactically and aggressively so he could out-calculate his opponents.

"They fall for traps that I know already and saves me time, and it gives me a better idea of how I should put my pieces compared to them," Daggupati said. "And in rapid, playing quick and good is the best combination, even if you had to sacrifice a little accuracy," Daggupati said.

During round 7, Daggupati played against National Master Vladyslav Baziuk and won this game in 19 moves – his shortest game on day 2. Daggupati played aggressively by attacking Baziuk's king, causing him to move his king to a very uncomfortable spot. Daggupati then ended the game shortly after Baziuk blundered when he played knight to g5.

"He blundered immediately, but to play the correct moves even then it would be a very complicated game," Daggupati said. "And since I knew the theory and still had ideas of how I was supposed to play, it [would] definitely be a very tough game."

Daggupati said he felt this tournament was good practice for tournaments later in the semester and next fall. He also said he enjoyed playing against strong opponents from other countries.

Moving on from the KCF Cup, the UTD chess team will host the Chess Fest from Feb. 19 to Feb. 21. Additionally, the team will be having the Final Four Presidents Cup on March 31 at JSOM, where Schitco and other members of the chess team will be commenting on their teammates' games.

"If you like the Final Four, if you like UTD, if you like any of those, then just tune in and listen to our commentary [for the Final Four Cup]," Schitco said.



IVAN SCHITCO



BALAJI DAGGUPATI



FM Prydun v. GM Schitco, KCF Cup 2024

Previous moves: 49. Kd2, Be7 50. Ke2, c5 51. Bg7

Black to move. What is Black's first step before taking the trapped Bishop

Answer: 51. Ke6

White's (Prydun) bishop is trapped because it will get captured no matter where it goes. Black (Schitco) needs to go closer to the bishop and the only move that enables him to do that is Ke6.



NM Baziuk v. GM Daggupati, KCF Cup 2024

Previous moves: 13. Kg3 d5 14. exd6 f5 15. Ng5

Black to move. How can Black win?

Answer: Qe1+

Black (Daggupati) has to give a check to White's (Baziuk) king with the Queen. Doing so can allow the knight to triple fork the king, rook, and queen which will win both the rook and queen.

COMETS

UTD SPORTS SCHEDULE

AWAYHOME



UTD ATHLETICS | COURTESY

BASEBALL

FEB 16 vs Texas Lutheran (DH)
12:00 PM & 3:00 PM

FEB 17 vs Texas Lutheran
12:00 PM

FEB 20 vs St.Thomas (TX)
6:30 PM
at San Jacinto College

FEB 23 vs Hardin-Simmons
6:00 PM
at Denotes ASC - Abilene

FEB 24 vs Hardin-Simmons
12:00 PM & 3:00 PM
at Denotes ASC - Abilene

FEB 27 vs Southwestern (TX)
2:00 PM

SOFTBALL

FEB 17 vs Ottawa (KS)
3:00 PM & 5:00 PM

FEB 24 vs Texas Lutheran
12:00 PM & 2:00 PM

FEB 25 vs St.Thomas (TX)
12:00 PM & 2:00 PM



SHREYA RAVI | MERCURY STAFF

M RADIO UTD UTD TV AMP

A podcast for students by students.

New Season airing live February 11th

LISTEN LIVE EVERY SUNDAY FROM 10AM-11AM CST ON RADIOUTD

OR WATCH RECORDED EPISODES ON UTD-TV OR THE MERCURY NEWSPAPER WEBSITE



Mercury Morning News





Mercury Morning News

Start your week knowing the latest news on UT Dallas.

LISTEN LIVE

Every Sunday from 10am-11am on RadioUTD starting Feb. 11th.

Or watch recorded episodes on UTD-TV or The Mercury website.

M RADIO UTD UTD TV AMP

HATING FURRIES PROVES YOU'RE UNEDUCATED

UTD has a bustling furry community, but why are these fans of humanoid animals treated like sexual predators and social outcasts?

MARIA SHAIKH
Opinion Editor

Stroll through a convention or browse an art website and you'll find them: modern fandom culture's laughingstocks. Whether uploading illustrations of their humanoid animal personas — better known as fursonas — online or dressing up as their characters for community meetups, the furry community's rapid growth has received just as explosive a backlash for being inherently sexual, according to some. Furies receive hate, ridicule and skepticism for creating erotic content of anthropomorphic animals, but this disdain is undeserved and unhelpful. It mischaracterizes the furry community as a chiefly sexual and dangerous place, minimizes furies' material contribution to society, and further stigmatizes already vulnerable people.

A lot of furry art and culture is sexual, no doubt. Studies report that over 50% of furies have sexual interest in humanoid animals, and NSFW material is easy to come by in furry-centric spaces. However, the furry community's sexual underbelly has been grossly exaggerated in public perception. The majority of furry conventions are non-sexual and open to all ages; the majority of fursuits are not designed for sex. Online furry spaces self-segregate erotic content away from underage and unwilling participants. Researchers even regard zoophilia — attraction to animals, which furies are accused



ANIKA SULTANA | MERCURY STAFF

of supporting — and furies' interest in humanlike creatures as two separate subjects. Many furies exist nonsexually within the community, and are unnecessarily shamed for a harmless interest.

Even if the community has sexual components, shunning all furies for their sexual interests is nonsensical. It suggests any community with a sexual current is defined by that sexuality, rather than being capable of separating family-friendly material from erotic content. Homophobes weaponize the same argument against queer people, arguing their "deviant" sexuality taints nonsexual community bas-

tions like pride parades and same-sex marriage. While being a furry isn't the same as being queer, allowing "X can be sexual, therefore X is always bad" rhetoric to disempower anyone is a slippery slope.

Shunning a community necessarily opens more avenues for abuse and exploitation. If a young person with an interest in furry content joined the fandom and found everyone in their life loathed furies, they would feel ganged up upon. They might devote more time to the community, thinking of it as the only place they belong and isolating themselves from others. They might become less resistant to

abuse and mistreatment within the community — "Everyone else hates us, how could I voice a negative opinion, too? We're oppressed, aren't we the good guys?" — and potentially get hurt themselves. This would be far less likely in a world where furies aren't abhorred, and this young person doesn't feel marginalized and alone for their interest. Similar principles are at work in the alt-right pipeline, abstinence-only education and other echo chambers. Social acceptance and open dialogue will always trump shame when it comes to educating and protecting people.

Furry fandom isn't just something

to tolerate, but a community worth appreciating. Thousands of people find meaning and friendship among other furies, learn new skills like art and event organizing, and even make a living from enthusiastic supporters. In 2023, the fandom collectively raised \$1.4 million for charitable causes, including LGBTQ+ servicing organizations and animal welfare causes. And since the majority of furies are bisexual, the fandom often acts as a queer-friendly support group.

UTD has a thriving furry community praised by its members for being a safe, accepting space where people help each other out — but many find themselves petrified of being ridiculed or harassed on campus should their secret be exposed. For an interest as harmless as enjoying humanoid animals, interacting with likeminded fans and participating in a community that champions tolerance and charity, the current stigma makes no sense. Sure, that person in your programming class with a blue wolf laptop sticker might have a sexual interest unlike yours, but that isn't necessarily true, nor is it helpful to stigmatize.

Next time your friend brings up furies in a mocking tone, push back against the undue ridicule. Next time you see someone in a fursuit, give them a smile. Chances are, they're no different from you, part of a community that empowers them to be themselves.

Taylor Swift AI deepfakes show need for stricter laws

ZARA JAMSHED
Staff Writer

Sexually explicit AI generated images of Taylor Swift at football games circulated on social media platforms such as X, Reddit, and Facebook on Jan. 24; social media companies are partly culpable. Swift's celebrity prominence has brought the issue of AI-generated photos to the forefront of the news, as this scandal underscores just how vulnerable even the most influential people are to deepfakes.

AI tools can create deepfakes: photorealistic images users can generate by entering a prompt into an AI tool. Texas has laws that criminalize deepfakes, but there is no federal law that does so. If we don't push Congress to pass federal policy or stricter guidelines on platforms like X, everyday internet users can create nonconsensual or humiliating photos of others using deepfakes.

With the current political polarization between our leading political parties, there are few measures or incentives that prevent political candidates from creating damaging, explicit, or misleading images of their opponents. For example, Reuters reported on how former Republican presidential candidate Ron DeSantis used deepfake technology to falsify a video of former president Donald Trump kissing Anthony Fauci, the chief medical advisor who endorsed COVID-19 vaccines and masks. Political candidates can easily spread rumors or falsify photos, which can mislead voters or reduce the amount of people competing in elections. This could disrupt free elections at the national, state and local level by increasing how many voters are casting ballots based on



GRACE COWGER | MERCURY STAFF

explicitly, boundlessly false information.

If AI was used to humiliate an international celebrity, it can be used to hurt other innocent people. Imagine after a bad break-up, a scorned ex creates humiliating photos and sends it to their former partner's family or employer. There are already many incidents of ex-partners recording and uploading intimate videos without their former partner's consent. In the case of AI technology, those violations and instances of sexual harassment are likely to increase as the technology develops and grows more commonplace. Rates of sexual harassment, especially against women, are already high, especially among the college age group. Deepfakes add another layer to this issue that must be dealt with to better protect people's right to privacy and right to be free from fraud or sexual

harassment.

We need to address deepfakes now. Certain Congressional members were alarmed this happened to someone as powerful and influential as Taylor Swift. They have realized if it can happen to her, it can happen to anyone. For example, Reality Defender, a cybersecurity company focused on detecting AI, determined with 90% confidence that the images of Taylor Swift were created through AI diffusion technology. This technology is available on more than 100,000 platforms and public models. Fortunately, this issue has caught the eye of senators in Congress.

On Jan. 30, a bipartisan group of U.S. senators introduced the "Defiance Act". This bill would allow victims depicted in nude or sexually explicit forgeries to seek

civil penalties against individuals who produced or distributed those images. What's unique about this bill is it was sponsored by two democrats and two republicans: a unity that is rare in Congress. Both citizens and politicians from both parties should join forces to pass legislation that regulate deepfakes nationally.

You may not believe forgery is a big problem, but many congressional members recognize the lasting damage it could have on victims. Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) has stated that "Innocent people have a right to...hold perpetrators accountable in court. This bill could make that a reality." Without a lot of legal protection in states outside of Texas, deepfakes will increase rates of blackmail and sexual harassment.

After the images were uploaded, X

eventually suspended certain culpable accounts. The company took further action and temporarily banned Taylor Swift's name from coming up in searches on the platform. But the photos were online and viewed millions of times, showing that corporate actions aren't enough to quell deepfakes' harm or virality.

We need to address deepfakes now. The Defiance Act was recently introduced, but if we don't push for it now in the wake of the bill's sponsoring and the scandal, Congress' attention will shift to other issues. The possibility for AI to create this new level of danger is why students should stand up to and voice support for bills that hold culprits liable for this action. UTD students can call or email their representatives and ask them to vote in support of the Defiance Act.

Comets deserve more support during campus construction

ZARA JAMSHED
Staff Writer

Spring semester welcomed students back to campus with construction barriers closing off frequently trafficked areas of campus. During this heavy construction period, students are burdened by increased car and foot traffic with few alternatives.

The student body at UTD is rapidly growing; with over 30,000 students now enrolled on campus, crowds and parking problems are part of daily life. Despite new construction to accommodate growth, however, UTD fails to accommodate its current students by not taking measures like limiting issuance of parking citations, installing temporary ramps or opening closed exits. When the facilities provided by UTD are already overburdened, shutting down large swathes of

campus with no alternatives ruins current students' college experience, even if the end goal is creating more student spaces.

Because of the ongoing construction of the new Student Union and the new Esports Lounge, central areas of campus are closed off, including parking lot G, the Green Center and part of the ramp walkway next to SU.

Closing off all the southern entrances to the SU food court makes navigating around campus more arduous, especially when you could previously cut through the SU for both speed and protection from weather. I understand that there are some safety construction codes that do not allow people to be near a construction area at a certain distance, but why are all the entrances on the south side closed at once? It does not make sense for those doors to be closed off if the construction is happening at The Pub.

Walking to class, anyone can see skateboarders, cyclists, and students with scooters and hoverboards going to their respective classes or simply cruising around the school. These students on wheels make up a significant part of the student body, and them being closer to pedestrians potentially creates safety hazards whenever they zoom by, especially since the walkway that is closed off is a ramp, which means people on wheels travel even faster.

And what about the students who use a wheelchair or those who cannot take the stairs? Many areas that are closed off include ramps, such as the one in the SU outside of Starbucks, and these closures increase the distance that those with mobility issues must travel. The SU, the heart of campus, is now inaccessible.

A solution to the heavy congestion of people in and around the SU could be keeping the southern exit of the SU food



YIYI DING | MERCURY STAFF

court available. If that part of the building isn't under renovation, and it is permissible under construction codes, it should be reopened for students to use.

For students with accessibility needs or wheeled modes of transport, every closed ramp should be replaced with an alternate ramped route of a similar length to ensure their well-being. It is important to ensure all students can move around campus eas-

ily and comfortably without wasting time on detours.

Please join me in reaching out to voice our opinions to Facilities Management and the Student Government to ensure we are heard and have a say in matters that affect us during this multiyear construction period. The future of UTD is important to focus on and sacrifice for, but the present-day cannot be forgotten.